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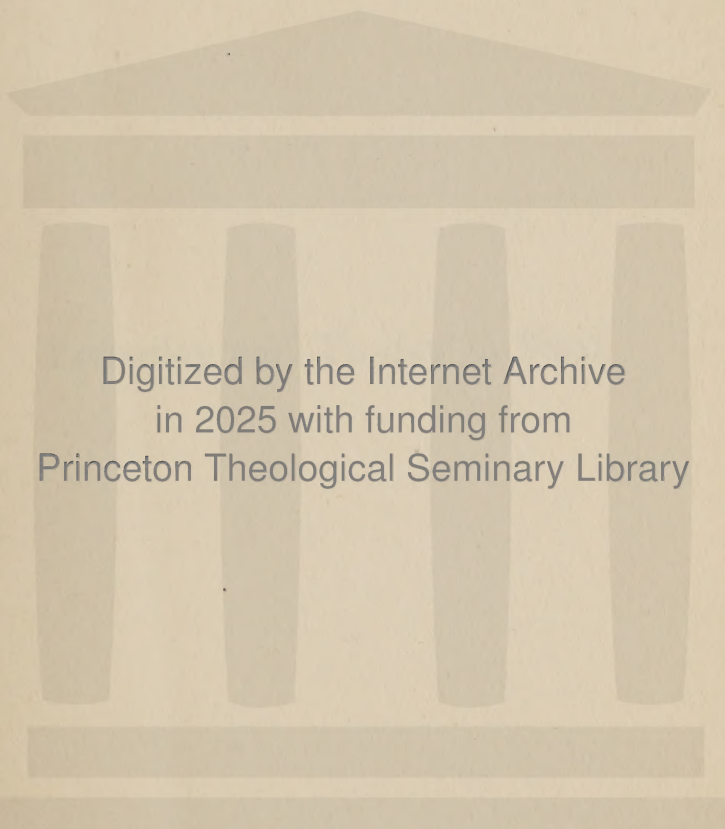
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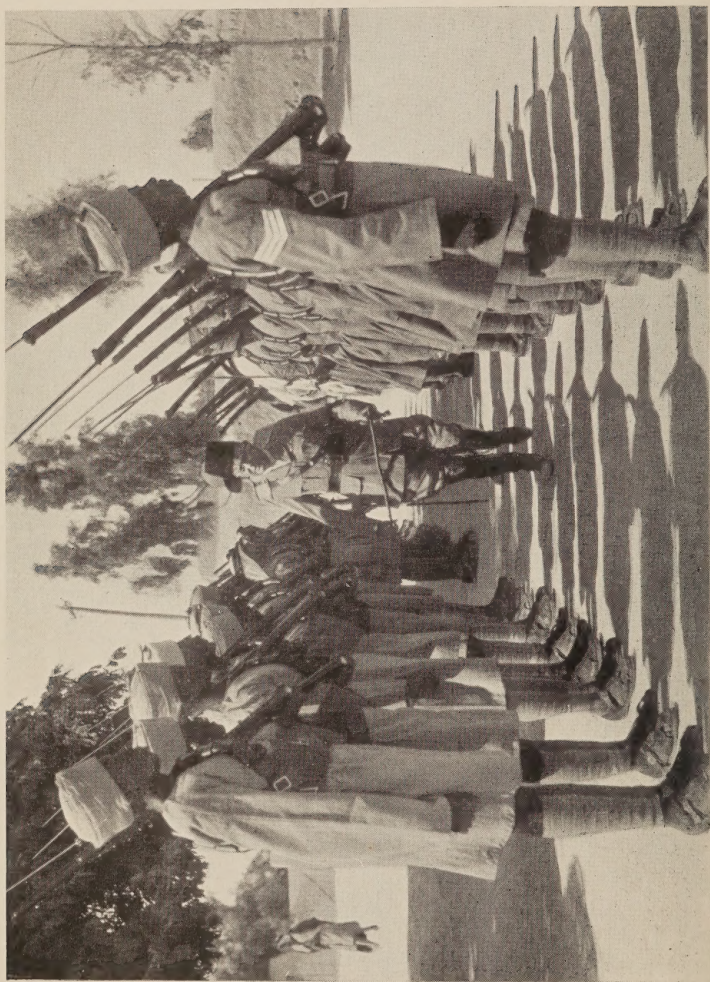


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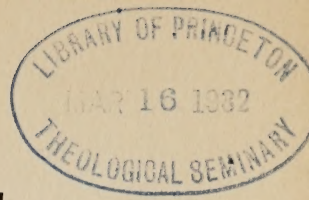


## Yesterday and To-day in Sinai



Major C. S. JARVIS, Governor of Sinai, inspecting a Guard of Honour.





# Yesterday and To-day in Sinai

BY

MAJOR C. S. JARVIS

GOVERNOR OF SINAI

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAP*



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
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*TO MY WIFE*

*WHO HAS ASSISTED ME WITH THIS BOOK,  
AND WHO HAS HELPED ME TO SEE  
THE HUMOROUS SIDE OF A  
LONELY LIFE THAT IS NOT  
ALWAYS AMUSING*





## FOREWORD

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ONE of the great difficulties of writing a book on the Near East is the question of spelling Arabic names and words. It should be borne in mind that there is no accepted method of spelling an Arabic word, and it is merely a matter of choice. The best-known Arabic name, Mohammed, is also spelt Muhamed, Muhammad and Mahomet, whilst the two words that have a more or less generally accepted spelling—*i.e.*, sheikh and harem, are very unfortunate instances, for the direct result of this is that one hears everybody unacquainted with the East referring to an Arab chieftain as a 'sheek' and to the inner matrimonial circle as the 'hairem.' If these words had been spelt 'shaikh' and 'hareem' there could have been no mistake. In this book I do not pretend to abide by any of the usually accepted forms of spelling Arabic words, and moreover I imagine I have not even been consistent in my own methods, as I am never certain whether to spell Bedawin as Bedouin or Beduin, and there are several other words just as confusing. Incidentally the correct word is BEDU, as Beduin is the plural form of the word, but as Beduin has been used

generally for generations as the singular I have not been pedantic about it.

I would also lay stress on the fact that my references to the Arab in the book are solely concerned with the Beduin Arab of Sinai, South Palestine and Trans-Jordan, with whom I am acquainted. In this part of the world the word Arab (plural Orban) means the Beduin and no one else, and I hold the view, therefore, that the true Arab is the existing nomad Beduin and not the settled inhabitant of the villages. My remarks, therefore, on the characteristics of the Arab apply solely to the desert Beduins, the attractive and hospitable but rather casual individuals amongst whom I live, and not to the cultivated and educated members of the Arab race who reside in cities and send their sons to the Universities.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I MUST express my thanks to Monsieur le Commandant Georges Douin, late French Navy, who has afforded me the greatest assistance in compiling the historical part of this book ; and who has given me the benefit of his exceptional knowledge of the history of Egypt.

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# CONTENTS

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CHAP.	PAGE
I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION . . . . .	I
II. THE ARAB . . . . .	16
III. ARAB LAW AND CUSTOMS . . . . .	38
IV. ARAB LAW (CIVIL) . . . . .	60
V. ADMINISTRATION OF SINAI . . . . .	79
VI. HISTORY.—I. . . . .	102
VII. HISTORY.—II. . . . .	117
VIII. SINAI AND THE WAR . . . . .	144
IX. THE FORTY YEARS' WANDERINGS . . . . .	158
X. SMUGGLING AND TRACKING . . . . .	186
XI. NATURAL HISTORY AND SPORT . . . . .	201
XII. THE MONASTERY OF ST. CATHERINE . . . . .	225
XIII. THE LOCUST CAMPAIGN IN SINAI . . . . .	241
XIV. QUAIL NETTING . . . . .	258
XV. THE AGRICULTURAL SHOW . . . . .	265
XVI. THE MURDER OF THE BASH SHAWISH . . . . .	274
APPENDIX—CAR ROUTES THROUGH SINAI . . . . .	291





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

---

MAJOR C. S. JARVIS, GOVERNOR OF SINAI, INSPECTING	
A GUARD OF HONOUR . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
TYPES OF SINAI INHABITANTS . . . . .	<i>Facing p. 4</i>
THE HEAD OF THE GULF OF AKABA . . . . .	14
AN ARAB AND FAMILY COMING ALONG THE OLD ROAD	
FROM PALESTINE TO EGYPT . . . . .	26
TRIBE OF ARABS WITH THEIR SHEIKHS ON THEIR	
WAY TO ATTEND A LAND LAWSUIT . . . . .	65
LT.-COL. A. C. PARKER, D.S.O. . . . .	82
CARS IN THE WADI NASB, SOUTHERN SINAI . . . . .	100
THE OLD RESERVOIR AT WADI GEDEIRAT . . . . .	112
NABBATEAN WRITINGS ON A ROCK IN WADI FEIRAN . . . . .	112
FAROAN ISLAND, IN THE GULF OF AKABA . . . . .	117
THE OLD CASTLE AT AKABA—EYLA OF THE CRUSADES . . . . .	124
THE MONASTERY OF MT. SINAI . . . . .	131
THE TOMBSTONE OF THE TURKISH COMMANDER-IN-	
CHIEF, KILLED IN THE WAR WITH NAPOLEON . . . . .	131
GEBEL SERBAL FROM THE WADI FEIRAN . . . . .	165
VIEW FROM THE AIR OF THE NARROW STRIP OF SAND	
SEPARATING THE BARDAWIL LAKE FROM THE	
MEDITERRANEAN . . . . .	177
ARAB POLICE SIGHTING SMUGGLERS . . . . .	188

FOUR ARAB SMUGGLERS WITH THEIR HASHISH AND ESCORT . . . . .	<i>Facing p.</i>	197
SIX-WHEELER CAR IN PURSUIT OF SMUGGLERS . . . . .	„	197
WAITING FOR FLIGHTING DUCK AT THE MOUTH OF THE WADI EL ARISH . . . . .	„	201
THE AUTHOR AND HIS SHIKARIS . . . . .	„	218
A STING RAY HOOKED IN ERROR . . . . .	„	224
A BRACE OF MILK-FISH FROM THE GULF OF AKABA . . . . .	„	224
INTERIOR OF THE MONASTERY SHOWING THE BELFRY . . . . .	„	235
THE ARCHBISHOP WITH THE MONKS OF THE MONASTERY . . . . .	„	240
EGYPTIAN ARMY SOLDIERS SPRAYING A TRENCH WITH FLAME GUNS . . . . .	„	246
SWARM OF LOCUST "HOPPERS" IN A TRENCH . . . . .	„	254
COMING UP THE RAS EL NAGB OR PASS OF AKABA . . . . .	„	304
THE ENTRANCE TO WADI FEIRAN FROM WADI SHEIKH ON THE MONASTERY TRACK . . . . .	„	308

## INTRODUCTION

FEW have had the good fortune to visit Mount Sinai, but Major Jarvis has not only visited it; he has lived on it for years, and is not only living on it now, but is its Governor.

No one who has been to the mountain, or rather peninsula, can escape trying to solve the riddle of how and where the Hebrews went across the Red Sea into the Promised Land, and where is the Mount of God from which Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments. Major Jarvis has not escaped the temptation of wrestling with the riddle, but he approaches it with great advantages over others in his close and intimate knowledge of every valley in the peninsula. Whether students of the Old Testament will accept all the suggestions which he makes in the following pages only time can show, but they are at least based on local knowledge rather than, as has sometimes happened, on general imagination.

To me, personally, it has been a delight to read what he has to say, and he has added to the debt of gratitude that is felt toward him by everyone who has travelled in the peninsula during his rule and enjoyed the privilege of his society as well as his protection.

KIRSOPP LAKE





# Yesterday and To-day in Sinai.

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## CHAPTER I.

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

“ I have been a stranger in a strange land.”—EXODUS ii. 22.

THOUGH a desert—or, to be more exact, a wilderness—Sinai, by reason of its geographical position as the link between Asia and Africa, always has been and always will be of considerable importance, and as a battlefield has seen more invading and retreating armies passing through than any other country in the world—Belgium not excepted. Its strategic value has been greatly increased by the cutting of the Suez Canal along its western boundary some sixty years ago, and has made it a familiar sight to every traveller to and from the Far East and Australia, though the portion of Sinai that is seen from a ship passing through the Canal is the least attractive and does not give a fair idea of the Peninsula.

Sinai is usually designated a desert ; but desert proper is a stretch of country devoid of water and vegetation such as the Sahara and the Libyan Deserts, and is usually a waste of undulating sand. Sinai, on the other hand, experiences an appreci-

## 2 YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY IN SINAI

able rainfall in the winter, with the result that scrub bushes and stunted trees grow thickly in places; it is cultivated by the Arabs in a haphazard fashion in suitable spots in all parts of the Peninsula; and water-holes or wells exist roughly every fifteen to twenty miles; so that its correct designation is a wilderness, lacking chiefly a virile and hard-working population to make it, if not exactly a garden, a much more attractive place than it is at present.

Sinai is best known as the wilderness in which the Israelites wandered for forty years, and passers-by, viewing the arid sandy waste on the eastern banks of the land, pity Moses and his followers and wonder how they existed. These sand dunes, however, die away some twenty miles from the Canal in a rocky ridge, which in its turn opens out on to a vast gravel plateau that extends one hundred miles to the Palestine frontier. This plateau continues northwards to within twenty miles of the Mediterranean shore—from the Canal to the town of El Arish there is a zone of sand dunes which are probably of more or less recent origin, but from El Arish to Rafa on the Palestine frontier the sand dunes die away and there is an undulating plain of sandy soil that yields excellent crops of barley and wheat in the winter and water-melons in summer.

The southern end of the plateau culminates in a huge limestone massif called Gebel Tih, which is shaped like a wedge. This falls away to the south, and immediately there rises, range upon range, a tumbled mass of granite mountains which continue to the apex of the Peninsula at Ras Mohammed. The granite is of all colours—blue, grey, red, pink,



and in parts purple and green. At some time in the world's history this part of Sinai must have been tossed and tumbled by terrific volcanic action, for the rock strata run at all angles and in some places are perpendicular.

It is these granite mountains that are seen from the Gulf of Suez, and their predominating colour—red—gives the Red Sea its name. At the foot of Mount Moses or Gebel Musa in the centre of the apex is situated the Justinian Monastery of St. Catherine, which was erected there because Gebel Musa has been accepted for the last sixteen hundred years as the site of the Law-Giving. The monastery, one of the oldest occupied buildings in the world, is unique in every way, and its importance and interest are such that a special chapter is devoted to its description.

The number of population of Sinai is uncertain, as, though a correct census of the settled inhabitants in the villages has been taken, the nomad Arab has a very marked antipathy to the 'numbering of the host,' as he considers it might be the thin end of the wedge of conscription, and moreover, to him as to most semi-civilised people, counting beyond ten presents almost insuperable difficulty. There are probably 25,000 nomads in the Peninsula, mostly offshoots of the great Arabian tribes, but they are nomads in a limited sense only, and their wanderings are confined to the daraks or areas claimed by each tribe.

The principal town of Sinai is El Arish, which stands on the sea coast twenty-eight miles from the frontier at Rafa. It has 7,000 inhabitants of

#### 4 YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY IN SINAI

mixed race, to which practically every country in the world has at some time or another added its quota. The town was originally founded by Actisanes, an Ethiopian King of Egypt, who exiled to El Arish the worst criminals of Egypt, having first cut off their noses so that escaping convicts could be easily detected. Owing to this the town received the name of Rhinocolorum, and for the next 3,000 years saw the passage of innumerable invading and retreating armies—Syrians, Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Greeks, Jews and French. Stragglers from every army no doubt dropped out and stayed at El Arish—Napoleon in 1799 occupied the town for over a year ; the Turks from the days of Moham-med Ali till the British occupation maintained a battalion of Bosnians or Albanians there, many of whom, on completion of their service, appear to have intermarried and settled down, with the result that the Arishia are of every type. In some families the heavy black or brown beard and dark eyes of the Syrian predominate, whilst others have the fair or red hair of the European, with blue or grey eyes, which may be due to the Bosnian strain or to the promiscuous strayings of Napoleon's troops.

The only other town of any importance, Tor, which is now the big quarantine station for pilgrims returning from Mecca, is populated by 1,000 inhabitants, part of whom are Greek Christians who have been settled there from time immemorial, whilst the remainder are of the usual Red Sea seafaring Arab type, which has nothing in common with the nomad Beduin of the interior, but appears to be the



The Gardener, NASR.  
Turkish Origin.



HEMEIDA EL MALEH.  
Palestine Semitic Type.



Sheikh SALEM EL  
AWAMRA.  
The most important Sheikh  
in Sinai.



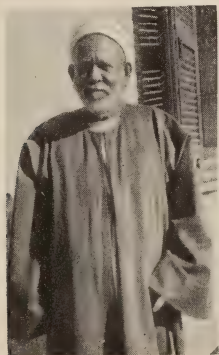
NIGM.  
An Arab Policeman of  
Lehwat Tribe.



An Arab of Hedjaz  
strain.



Sheikh SAAD ABU NAR.  
Howietat Tribe.



HAJI KERIM BEY ABDEL  
SHAFI OMDEH of El Arish.  
Bosnian Origin.



Sheikh HAJI SHEHAB  
NEKHLAWI.  
Moorish Origin.





exclusive product of such ports as Jeddah, Yambo, Wej, Kosseir, &c., the small harbour towns that lie scattered along both coasts of the Red Sea.

In early Christian times Tor was considered to be the Elim of the Israelitish wanderings, and attracted a large number of hermits and pilgrims who used it as a starting place for the journey to the Monastery of St. Catherine. In the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Tor (together with Kosseir on the opposite side of the Gulf) was used extensively as a port for the Indian and Chinese trade which in those days was transported across Egypt by camel to Alexandria or Rosetta, and thence shipped by the Venetians to Europe. The discovery by the Portuguese of the route round the Cape of Good Hope and the opening up of direct trade with the East in the sixteenth century killed the Gulf of Suez commerce, and Tor, from being a thriving port, fell from its high estate and became little more than a fishing village.

In the centre of the Peninsula is a deserted village called Nekhl, which previous to the war was the capital of the Province and in which the Governor resided. Nekhl in those days owed its importance to the fact that it was the main watering station on the Darb el Haj (road of the pilgrims). There is a fort at Nekhl built by Sultan Selim in the sixteenth century and two huge masonry cisterns which were filled with water from the well near-by to supply the great caravans of pilgrims from Egypt, Morocco, Algiers and Spain, who passed that way on the road to Mecca. A similar fort was built at Akaba just across the frontier, and both these forts were gar-

## 6 YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY IN SINAI

risoned by Moors, who were entrusted with public security on the pilgrim road. The inhabitants of Nekhl—*i.e.*, the Nekhlawia—are the direct descendants of these Moors, and it is quite obvious even to-day that they are of another race, as they are all tall and well built, and during the recent war provided a few camel men who were conspicuous for their courage and daring.

The building of the Palestine Railway across the north of Sinai, and the opening up of the pilgrim sea route from Suez to Jeddah, effectually killed Nekhl, as probably not ten pilgrims in the year pass that way and the trade to Palestine now is carried by the railway. One by one the Nekhlawia deserted their shops and went to live in El Arish, and the population of Nekhl at the present time consists of a police post and two inhabitants. A very senior official who was inspecting Sinai recently saw Nekhl marked on the map as if it were a city of some importance and arranged to stay there one day, seeing the town and interviewing the inhabitants. He was rather upset on arrival to find a guard of honour of three police and a corporal and one dejected Nekhlawi.

"And where are the inhabitants?" he asked the corporal.

"They're here, your Excellency," said the Corporal solemnly; "the other one has gone to fetch his camel."

Kantara, on the Canal and the terminus of the Palestine Railway, is known to every soldier who served in the Near East during the war, and there are few of them who retain very happy memories

of it. In those days it was a vast cantonment—a military city—stretching four miles into the desert, but to-day nothing remains except the Army Dental Hospital, which, unlike the rest of the buildings, was constructed of concrete instead of mud, presumably to deaden the anguished screams of the patients. As the terminus of the Palestine Railway it has a certain measure of importance, and there is a small village of 500 inhabitants who trade with the Arabs and Hedjaz camel and pony merchants who are constantly passing through.

Rafa, a small village in the midst of a vast undulating plain, is of no particular interest except that it is on the frontier and the shops have been so carefully erected by far-seeing tradesmen on the exact boundary that so far no Customs official has been able to decide what constitutes smuggling and what does not. Technically, the mere act of cooking beans in the kitchen and eating them in the living-room is an offence against the laws of contraband, as the viands have had to pass the frontier *en route*. So far the situation has baffled the most erudite officials.

The Mediterranean sea-coast is absolutely flat and featureless—a bright blue sea washing up on yellow sands, without a cape or promontory to break the monotony the whole length from Port Said to the frontier. Some thirty miles east of Port Said lies the Bardawil Lake, which normally is a huge, dry, clay pan some six to ten feet below the sea level. This is let as a mullet fishery to a contractor, who cuts a channel from the lake to the sea every autumn and floods the whole depression. The grey mullet



## 8 YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY IN SINAI

is a fish of an inquiring turn of mind and is in the habit of exploring estuaries and inlets, so that he flocks into the lake in literal millions. What these fish find to feed on is a complete mystery, as the bottom of the lake is flat clay in which no weed grows, and the banks are pure sand, but there must be some form of food which is not only attractive but very fattening, as when summer comes the mullet, which were half a pound on entering, are now all about the two-pound limit and full of roe. Either the urge to spawn or the increasing heat of the water in the shallow lake then drives them out to sea, but meanwhile a huge net barrier has been constructed across the channel.

The mullet range along the net for a few minutes, nosing against the meshes, and then, finding their way barred, jump to clear it. The mullet can jump as high as a salmon, but this has been provided against, and the top of the net is laid back and supported on struts so that it forms a platform on which the fish fall and are then collected by men who are constantly passing up and down. Occasionally, when there is a rush on, the lake positively boils with jumping fish, and the platform net is filled to breaking-point. Tens of thousands of mullet are collected in a day and the roe is extracted, dried, pressed and turned into a sort of caviare, the local name of which is bitarikh. It is not particularly palatable but commands a ready sale at five shillings a pound, a very high price for Egypt, its popularity apparently being due to the fact that it is commonly supposed to be an aphrodisiac. The smaller fish are salted and turned into 'fessikh,' a form of dried

fish very popular with the poorer classes, presumably because it goes a long way, and the smell of a barrel of fessikh will travel considerably farther than that of a fried fish shop at home.

The frontier south of Rafa is also featureless, and as the boundary marks are some miles apart it needs a surveyor to determine exactly which is Sinai and which Palestine. This is a factor of which the malefactor and merchant with smuggling propensities take full advantage, and cases have occurred of murders occurring one side and the bodies being removed to the other, to defeat the ends of justice, as no one so thoroughly appreciates the laws of extradition as the Arab, particularly when his actions are open to criticism or inquiry. This undulating flat plain continues for some fifty miles, when the soil turns to gravel and limestone ranges of rocky hills facilitate the delimitation of the frontier, but at the same time the frontier is easily crossed at all parts, and there is nothing in the nature of a pass by which all traffic must travel.

Close to the frontier is the small hamlet of Kosseima in which about fifty natives of El Arish live, and which is an important police post. Kosseima possesses a spring of water which flows constantly winter and summer and provides for the existence of a grove of eucalyptus and casuarina trees—a restful patch of green in the brown and yellow desert. Three miles away another spring gushes out of the hillside and flows through a rocky wadi (water-course)—the Wadi Gedeirat—for a distance of a mile and a half. Recently, however, the Frontiers Administration of Egypt have dammed this stream

about half a mile below its source and have led the water through pipes along the hillside, maintaining its level till it flows into a huge reservoir, 25 yards by 25 yards and 10 feet deep, from which the water is distributed to cultivation below. The idea is not an original one, as there are traces of an old dam now utterly destroyed, and the reservoir used is the reservoir constructed by the Ancients, whoever they may have been.

The place is of very considerable interest, as there is absolutely nothing to prove who were the original inhabitants that cultivated the wadi and constructed the dam and the reservoir. So little remains of the dam that the small scraps of masonry existing tell nothing beyond the fact that the mortar used is of four or five different varieties and colours. Apparently some mortars had strength for binding stones together, but were not watertight, and *vice versa*. The reservoir, which is practically intact, should teach something, but this also affords no obvious clue. The construction is massive and solid, but it definitely lacks the thoroughness and perfection of masonry that one finds in all Roman remains in Egypt. There was never anything shoddy or jerry-built with the Romans, and they almost invariably in all works put in a few pieces of carving—a capital here and there or a lion's mouth for a water-spout. There is not a trace of any carving and the stones, though roughly shaped, have not been properly cut, and, what is still more significant, the 'bond is not broken'—*i.e.*, the joins in the courses of stone are more frequently opposite each other than otherwise. This definitely proves that the



masonry is not real Roman, and the fact that it represents a considerable amount of heavy labour proves still more definitely that it is not Arab—or at any rate modern Arab.

It is possible that the irrigation system was the work of Moses and his host, as Exodus and Numbers constantly refer to Kadish Barnea, which apparently was the Israelitish headquarters during the forty years' stay in Sinai. Ain Kadeis, some five miles to the south, has been generally accepted as the Kadish Barnea of the Bible, but one has only to see the two springs to realise that Ain Gedeirat is obviously the site of the old settlement. I deal more fully with this theory in the chapter devoted to the Israelites, in which an attempt is made to substantiate this view, not so much because I believe it myself, but because I think it would be very attractive if one could believe it.

It may quite probably be the work of the Nabateans, that mysterious Arab or Yemeni race who occupied Petra from about 500 B.C., and civilised themselves without outside help. They became exceedingly wealthy by compelling all camel caravans from Arabia and India to come into Petra to pay dues and buy stores. To enable them to do this they had to maintain outposts in Palestine, Syria and presumably Sinai also. If this view is accepted, Ain Gedeirat was very probably a Nabatean police post, and the construction of the dam and reservoir the obvious result of the enforced settlement in a barren region.

A third possibility is that Gedeirat may have been the headquarters of one of the Roman Colonial



Legions—a reserve colonising force or rather emigration system employed by the Romans in the latter days of the Empire to police outlying districts and maintain public security at small cost. The system consisted of sending a legion of time-expired men with their wives and families to colonise and police some captured territory that in itself was of no particular value but which was essential from the point of view of communications. The men selected were seldom if ever Romans, but were foreign legionaries recruited in Gaul, Spain, Bulgaria, Britain, &c. They were invariably cultivators of the soil and were dumped down at their post with powers to exact forced labour from the existing inhabitants, and were expected to maintain themselves and police the area in return for free land. The rough construction of the dam might therefore be explained if it were the work of a foreign legion of Spaniards, Gauls, or even Britons—though it is most unlikely that Britons would be sent to cultivate a semi-tropical country.

The fourth theory is uninteresting—*i.e.*, that it is the work of the Christian Greeks who occupied the El Arish area prior to the Mohammedan invasion, and who, judging from the ruins in El Arish itself, were highly civilised.

The reservoir had completely silted up with mud to the brim and had to be dug out. Whilst the work was going on a most careful search was made for coins or clues of any kind, but nothing was found except sherds of pottery of the later Roman period, which is not definite proof that the reservoir is of the same age, and so Wadi Gedeirat remains a

mystery. The Antiquities Department of Egypt are so busily occupied in studying the vastly interesting tombs and records of early dynastic days that anything Roman or Ptolemaic is of necessity regarded as hopelessly modern—almost mid-Victorian in fact.

South of Kosseima the country becomes more and more mountainous, till at the Ras el Nagb the high land falls away 2,500 feet to the sea level in three miles. During the invasion of the Hedjaz by Ibrahim Pasha in the early part of the nineteenth century a road down this pass was constructed to enable him to get his artillery through. The greater part of this track has been washed away, but recently the road has been roughly repaired, and it is now just possible for cars, so that a southern route to Trans-Jordan now exists. The gradient in parts is one in three and there are some surprising hairpin bends, and this, combined with a loose surface, makes the journey something of an adventure and unsuitable for anything but a high-powered car. The individual who habitually drives with faulty brakes would be effectually and permanently cured of this propensity in this pass.

The head of the pass is guarded by a blockhouse which in the days when the Hedjaz administered, or to be more exact failed to administer, Akaba and the Wadi Araba area was a veritable necessity. Since, however, the Trans-Jordan Government have taken over this territory hostile raids have almost entirely ceased. Forty miles north at Kuntilla there is a fort, the headquarters of the Sudanese Camel Corps, who act as gendarmerie and are employed for big patrols and as a striking force.

Kuntilla, which stands on twin hills, is an enormously strong position, as an unbroken plain extends in all directions for several miles, and as it commands the only water supply in the vicinity it is a frontier post that might one day be of considerable importance.

South of an imaginary line drawn from Ras el Nagb to Suez, the limestone changes to granite and the country is most mountainous and wild. Ibex are found on the roughest and highest mountains in considerable numbers, and leopards who prey on the ibex and the Arab flocks. The only car road existing in Southern Sinai is the track that leads from Suez to Abu Zeneima and thence to Tor, with a side road up to the Wadi Feiran to the monastery—this is a road in name only, as the violent floods that cross this mountainous area sweep away in a few seconds the work of months.

At Abu Zeneima there is a mining settlement, the Sinai Mining Company, engaged in the extraction of manganese from a mine situated twenty miles away. Manganese is mainly used in the manufacture of steel, and as the steel trade has for long been in an unsatisfactory condition, manganese has also been affected. The mine, however, is run most efficiently and economically, and is so financially sound that it will weather worse storms than the existing one.

The eastern shore of Sinai, which is washed by the Gulf of Akaba, is most picturesque and interesting. On both sides of the Gulf huge mountains run down sheer into the sea, which, owing to its great depth, is a wonderful deep blue in colour. There are several





The head of the Gulf of Akaba, showing the Mountains on the Hedjaz side.





small anchorages along the coast of no particular importance except Sherm, where gatteras (large open sailing boats) are engaged in landing sheep and camels for the Nile Valley trade from the Hedjaz.

The Gulf swarms with fish of every description, many of which are of the big mackerel and herring type, such as the tunny, bonita, barracouta, coryphée, &c., and no doubt if the proper tackle were used excellent sport could be obtained here. The crayfish is also plentiful and of huge size. The Arabs do not eat crayfish and are only too pleased to sell them at a halfpenny each, whereas in Cairo, where shell-fish is scarce, they fetch ten shillings apiece. An attempt has recently been made to bring them in a small steamer fitted with a refrigerator from the Akaba coast to Cairo ; but, despite the vast difference between the purchase and sale prices, the overhead charges were such that the scheme proved a failure.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE ARAB.

"And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him."—GENESIS xvi. 12.

THE word Arab is improperly used in all parts of the world to describe Mohammedans who have no claim whatsoever to Arab nationality. As the name itself implies, an Arab must be a native of Arabia—*i.e.*, a Hedjaz Arab, and although the improper application of the name to all Arabic-speaking peoples has persisted for many hundreds of years, and Malays, Moors, Palestinians and Egyptians are alluded to as Arabs, the real Arab is *ipso facto* the Arabian Beduin or his pure descendants. In Palestine in the newspaper reports and official communiques the Mohammedan population are almost invariably described as Arabs, whereas the inhabitants of the villages and towns have for the most part very little or no Arab blood, but are the original Philistines, Jebusites and Canaanites who occupied that country previous to the Jewish invasion. The true Arab or Bedu predominates in Southern Palestine south of Gaza and Beersheba, and odd tribes are encamped in various other parts, but they have little in common with the fellah who occupy the villages and rich lands, and who were recently busily engaged in raiding Jewish settlements.

In the Western Desert of Egypt the Aulad Ali and other big tribes that inhabit the Mediterranean littoral have some vague claim to Hedjazi descent and adopt Arab customs, but they are not true Arabian Arabs and are most probably the descendants of the original Libyans who occupied that part of the world prior to the Mohammedan invasion. Facially they do not resemble the Semitic type, but are a virile, well set up race of men with short straight noses, whereas the true Arab is usually a small spare man with either a long or eagle-shaped nose. A true test of the pure Arab is his beard, or rather lack of it—he is quite unable to grow a ‘chest protector’ or Crimean war monstrosity, such as makes a perusal of old family portrait albums such a painful proceeding. The Arab beard is very sparse, with a ridge of black hair along the line of the jaw terminating in a tuft on the point of the chin. An Arab who can grow a W. G. Grace excrescence has foreign blood in his veins. There is one tribe in Sinai—the Bayadin—who are all lusty specimens of six feet or more with huge patriarchal beards. Their origin is unknown, but their insistence on their pure Arab blood, and the application of Arab laws and ordinances to the tribe, is so marked that one feels they protest too much and that there must be a skeleton in the family cupboard. It is quite possible that they are the descendants of some Roman colonial legion who were stranded in Sinai after the Mohammedan invasion and therefore might be of any European stock.

The Arab suffers from the disability of having been for the last ten years or so a popular hero,



and the cinema and lady novelist have woven a wonderful halo of romance around the 'sheek,' depicting him as everything chivalrous, noble and picturesque, and attributing to him as his favourite pastime the carrying off of white ladies—misunderstood wives preferred. The British Government also have ever since the Madhi's rebellion in the Sudan conceived a most respectful attitude toward the Arab, crediting him with wonderful fighting qualities and recognising him as a most powerful and dangerous enemy. They are in constant apprehension of an Arab holy war led by some fanatical sect ; the fear of a recrudescence of Mahdism in the Sudan is ever present in the minds of our home officials, whilst in the Western Desert there is always the Senussi bugbear of half a million hardy desert warriors marching on the Nile Valley. And if these fail there is the Wahibi menace from Arabia, and even more hardy desert warriors laying waste Palestine and Iraq.

The Fuzzy-Wuzzy of the Sudan was certainly a very first-class fighting man, but once he was faced with a disciplined and organised force armed with weapons of precision his resistance crumpled very quickly. The difficulty of quelling the Sudan revolt lay in communications and the enormous effort required to get in touch with the enemy, who stood his ground the other side of some hundreds of miles of waterless desert. The Western Desert campaign of 1916 should have completely exploded the Senussi myth, when a thousand odd Beduin penetrated into the oases on the west of the Nile ; but such was the firm belief in the possibility of half a million fighting

Arabs from the Sahara marching across the desert to the Nile Valley that it was more than a year before the authorities were convinced that the Senussi mountain was a molehill. And during that time some thousands of British soldiers, urgently required elsewhere, were kept watching a perfectly empty desert, and millions of pounds were expended in maintaining communications. A Wahibi force of Hedjaz Arabs some thousands strong ran foul of the Royal Air Force east of Amman a few years after the war and made their first acquaintance with armoured cars and aeroplanes. The dice were heavily loaded against the Arab, of course, and perhaps it was not a fair test, but since then the Wahibeens have shown no desire for a return match.

The truth of the matter is that the Arab is not a first-class fighting man; this may be due to the fact that his natural repugnance to discipline causes lack of cohesion and there is nothing to hold a force together once the enemy have administered a check. The Australians aptly described them as being "very good ten-minute fighters," as, if their first charge succeeds, there is nothing so savage and terrifying as Arab horsemen dealing with a demoralised enemy—and nothing quite so easy as the same Arabs with the 'wind up.' The Arab co-operation on Allenby's right flank during the Palestine campaign had a considerable value in drawing off the enemy's troops and making the Turkish Commander uneasy about his left flank; but they were a doubtful fighting force in face of resistance, and there was always a big discrepancy between the parade on pay day and the fall-in for an attack.

The Arab, therefore, like the Irishman, is credited with qualities he does not possess. For centuries the Irishman has been assumed to be gifted with the only real sense of humour, yet put on a play or film in a Dublin or Cork theatre caricaturing the Irish character, and the theatre will be wrecked. Put on a similar play in London or New York caricaturing an Englishman or an American, and the house will rock with laughter. The Scotsman, we firmly believe, is entirely lacking in a sense of humour and is mean, yet the average Scotsman will stand you a drink and regale you with the stock stories dealing with Aberdeen meanness.

The Arab rather fancies himself as a fighter—he cannot forget that his forbears conquered half the civilised world fourteen hundred years ago, but he does not claim to be a wonderful figure of romance and is rather puzzled that he should be accepted as such. He is not addicted to the habit of carrying off white ladies, and his behaviour at all times with European women is a pattern of propriety. However uncouth and dilapidated his appearance—and the Sinai Arab, being the poor relation of the big Arab tribes, is usually a rather ragged and forlorn-looking creature—there is a natural dignity, even courtliness, in his bearing that reveals pride of birth. He is avaricious to a degree and his standard of honesty and truthfulness not high; he accepts a system of corruption and oppression with equanimity, and bribery and intrigue are recognised methods of procedure; yet, whatever his own attitude may be in his dealings with his own people and with other Orientals, he demands and expects a very



different standard from an Englishman. He thoroughly respects honesty and truthfulness when he meets them, though he finds it very difficult at first to believe that such qualities really exist, and it takes an English Governor at least five years to win his confidence. Once, however, it has been generally agreed that the Governor has passed the acid test and is a man of his word, administration is easy, as his judgment is accepted without question.

It is difficult to say exactly what qualities an Administrator should possess to win the Arab's confidence and affection, as mere honesty and strength of purpose are not sufficient in themselves. One must endeavour to see things from an Arab standpoint and to take an interest in the things that interest them. An ability to use a shot-gun or rifle is a great asset, and a thorough knowledge of the desert fur and feather and their respective tracks commands respect. One must also be able to do a long day on a camel without fatigue, and one secret of Lawrence's great popularity was his ability, despite his physique, to tire out the most hardened desert camel rider.

Colonel Parker, who was Governor of Sinai for many years, and was so popular with the Arabs that he was known throughout Sinai, Trans-Jordan and the Hedjaz as 'Barker,' without the 'Bey' or 'Pasha' attached—a sure sign of affection—possessed all the attributes mentioned above. He was tireless on a camel and also on foot, as he would follow a covey of mountain partridges over the most impossible country, "like an ibex" as an Arab aptly described it. His name will probably



be passed down to posterity among the Arabs, and future historians will no doubt be considerably puzzled over a mythical Ingleezi called 'Barker,' who held sway in Sinai 'min zeman' (long ago), and will probably decide he must have been a Crusader.

There is a very good story of Parker which goes to prove how much he was respected in Sinai, and also what confidence Arabs place in their British Governors. On the occasion of the edict granting independence to Egypt in 1922, and the conferring of the title of King on the reigning Sultan, Parker held an Arab levée and made the announcement that the Sultan would in future be King. At the conclusion of the ceremony an old Arab came up and shook Parker warmly by the hand. "There's no man will do it better," said he. He was under the impression that Parker had been created King of Sinai, and thoroughly approved of the selection.

The Arabs of Sinai are absolutely ignorant and uneducated, but this does not mean that they are brainless. I have always held the view that the average Arab is born into this world with a very good brain, but that it becomes atrophied by disuse. He spends his entire life walking behind a drove of camels, sleeping under a bush for days and weeks whilst his camels graze, or jogging across the desert with a load of charcoal to sell in Suez, so that when one first meets him he appears to be half an idiot who fails to understand a word one says to him. If one travels with him for a day or so, however, his brain begins to work slowly, though it evidently moves creakily at first, till at the end of a week he turns into quite an intelligent man with a marked

sense of humour. A young Arab caught at the age of eighteen or nineteen and enlisted into the police gets his brain working surprisingly quickly and usually proves most intelligent—sometimes *too* intelligent. Some of them get so clever that they realise they are wasting their time in the police and resign in order to use their brains to better or worse purpose, and make a very good thing out of exploiting their relatives.

A certain young Arab policeman—now returned to civil life—when on duty at a lonely outpost met a Hedjazi merchant who had sold some camels well in El Arish and was carrying the result, some eighty pounds, in notes of all denomination—ten pound, five pound, one pound and ten shillings. In the course of conversation the policeman made the amazing but pleasing discovery that the merchant was quite ignorant of the values of the different notes. Whilst talking about money and trade generally the policeman volunteered the information that the sheep business was pretty good in those parts at that particular time, and that if one got in on the ground floor with someone who knew the ropes, a profit of fifty or even a hundred per cent might be looked for. The merchant thought the proposition sounded attractive and provided the policeman with some notes, with the result that a series of most profitable transactions took place, at the end of which the merchant found himself with twice as many notes as when he started and went on his way rejoicing. On the discovery, however, that all his notes were ten shilling ones, and that those of higher denomination had disappeared dur-

ing the transactions, he realised that there were realms in the financial world beyond his understanding and very unsportingly reported the matter to higher authority—hence the policeman's return to civil life.

Perhaps the most marked characteristic of the Sinai Arab is his absolute loathing of work in any form. It has always been an understood thing in the best Arab circles that manual labour is degrading and that, though menial tasks may be performed by women and negro slaves, it is distinctly declass   for a man to debase his manhood by using a fas (mattock) or shovel. To keep body and soul together he must perforce cultivate the soil and produce sufficient barley to provide for himself, his family and camels, but it is a most distasteful business, and if the crop fails from lack of rain it is distinctly annoying ; but on the other hand it is a great consolation to think that there will be no corn to harvest or thresh—and after all it is Allah's wish and there will be no taxes to pay. Also, if one can find a native of El Arish who will take over the land and pay as rent a quarter of the yield, this is a far more satisfactory if less remunerative state of affairs, as one can then devote the whole of one's time to contemplation of the Universe as represented by a few square miles of desert, coffee-drinking and litigation—the salt of the Arab's life. The normal attractions of this world leave him cold—he does not read newspapers, and so is not interested in Egypt's struggle for independence any more than the partition of Hungary or Poland's corridor to the Baltic ; he is not interested in trains,



cars, or aeroplanes—he accepts them as a phase of the Frangis' well-known madness ; he has no amusements, pastimes, or interests in life except lawsuits.

What golf is to the golf maniac and tennis to the tennis pot-hunter, so is litigation to the Arab. There is not an Arab in Sinai who has not at least one unsettled case, and men of standing and repute have, as befits their position, six or seven. An Arab youth cannot lay claim to man's estate till he has a case to bring or defend against another, and there is perhaps nothing quite so depressing as to have this case definitely settled by some well-meaning interfering official. Suggest to an Arab that he should take a fas and put in an hour's work cutting a water channel to his cultivation, and he will wear the expression of a martyr going to the stake, and if one takes one's eyes off him for a moment will probably fade away with his family to Palestine for a year to escape the task. On the other hand, tell him to journey 200 miles to Maan to have a hearing of his case concerning a goat worth eight shillings, supposed to have been stolen five years before, and he will cheerfully set forth, whatever the weather, and travel from 40 to 50 miles a day.

However poverty-stricken an Arab may be, and even if he has not had a square meal for ten days, he will cheerfully find £10 to bribe some totally useless person whom he thinks might possibly tilt the scales of justice in his favour in a land case concerning a stretch of sand that has never borne crops and never will. It is difficult to understand this, and the conclusion I have come to is that litigation is the Arab pastime and sport, into which



he enters with his whole heart and with the true sporting spirit. "Must a game be played for the sake of the pelf?" is evidently his motto, and it matters not to him if he has spent the whole of his visible assets and wasted months of his time, provided he has been allowed to hold forth at great length in a court-room; and has wasted two precious hours of a busy man's time over some trifling matter that is of no real concern to him or anyone else.

Not only is he interested in his own private cases, but he enters with avidity into inter-tribal litigation and squabbles. There are two charming old gentlemen in Sinai who are the respective sheikhs of two adjoining tribes, the Terrabin and Teaha. They are the best of friends and have the greatest respect one for the other, but regularly once a fortnight they attend the Arab meetings in El Arish, and there is always a Terrabin and Teaha case to be heard. It is usually something absurdly trivial, but serious crimes may occur if the steam is not allowed to escape from the safety valve as represented by these Arab courts, and so the inter-tribal case comes on. Immediately these two benign old gentlemen take the floor, and with raised voices, flashing eyes and hand on the hilt of the half-drawn sword, act the part of the outraged and foully treated martyr, till lack of breath and cracked voices bring the proceedings to a close, when the case is adjourned for three months, the two actors go outside and take coffee together, and honour is satisfied.

There is a tendency in England to become far more concerned than is necessary over Arab raids, and to regard them as serious hostilities. Normally,



An Arab and family coming along the old road from Palestine to Egypt.



raiding is much the same to an Arab as association football is to the Englishman. It is really very little more than a sport—a dangerous one, certainly, as there are usually casualties; but, considering the numbers engaged, these are very trifling—and it is a sport in which certain rules are regarded. So long as these rules are respected, and the tribes concerned do not get too incensed with one another, there is nothing to get very much alarmed about in raids. In fact, a little mild raiding is a very good thing, as it keeps the young hot-heads of the tribes fully occupied and engages the attention of the sheikhs and amateur orators to the exclusion of other more dangerous topics.

Practically every tribe in Arabia and Sinai is engaged in a blood-feud with the neighbouring tribe, and, though these blood-feuds may slumber for a time and the two tribes may even ally themselves temporarily against a third, immediately things get slack again the tribe that lost the last match will open the campaign with a raid against their erstwhile allies, and it will all start again. When fox-hunting is put down in England, and when the fraternity of fox-hunters accept the situation and take up golf instead, then we may expect to see the Beduin Arab give up inter-tribal raiding; but the hobby they adopt in its stead will not be golf, it will probably be something of real concern to the world at large.

These inter-tribal blood-feuds are no light matter to the Arab, and it will take a very big man indeed who will have power enough to weld all the Beduin of Arabia, Sinai, Iraq and Palestine into one nation



in which petty jealousies and tribal squabbles are sunk in the face of some big ideal. The biggest thing that has happened in the Arab world since the Mohammedan invasion was the revolt in the desert led by Feisal and Lawrence. Both these leaders were exceptional in every respect, but they quite failed to arouse any real national spirit in the tribes, who were far more occupied in their inter-tribal hatreds than in the extermination of the Turkish invader. Both Lawrence and Feisal had the greatest difficulty when on the march to persuade the tribe through whose darak (area) they were travelling to allow the remainder of the army to pass through their country, and Lawrence's campaign was a series of constant and maddening pin-pricks and disappointments caused by the jealousies and suspicions of his sheikhs. So long, therefore, as the present system of inter-tribal raiding pertains, so long may we regard the bugbear of a Jihad or Holy War against all non-Mohammedans as outside the range of possibility.

The ordinary raid is carried out by anything from thirty to two hundred of the young men of a tribe. If the tribe owns horses, and this is not the case in Sinai where the country is too waterless for anything but camels, the system is to ride the camels to the scene of action, leading the horses. Tribes do not dwell all together in one place, but are split up into ailas (families), and the normal gathering in any one place is seldom more than ten tents or, say, thirty or forty men. Needless to say, the raiding party take very good care that they predominate in numbers, and, moreover, have the advantage of

surprise. The raiding party having located their quarry, mount their horses and pour in a ragged volley with their rifles and then charge with blood-curdling yells. The defenders rush to their tents and seize their arms, and there follows a mêlée in which one or two men may possibly be wounded by sword-cuts, after which the raiders move off with all the camels and sheep they can collect.

Judging from the raids I have investigated from time to time, I have come to the conclusion that there is seldom any desire to kill in these raids. Accidents, of course, will happen in the best regulated affairs, but unless there has been a recent killing in a previous raid which someone personally concerned wishes to avenge, the object seems to be to have a really good time, with some valuable camels to carry off as a prize and no very serious consequences afterwards. If severe casualties occur, the Government concerned will feel it necessary to take action, and this is not considered to be in accordance with the true sporting spirit. The adherents of Aston Villa may feel vastly incensed against the Arsenal if the London team score six goals to nil, but they would not consider it in the best interests of sport if half a dozen Aston policemen allied themselves with the Villa at half-time and helped to put on a dozen goals or so against the visitors. This is very much the attitude of the Arab—as a matter of course after a raid he complains to the authorities, omitting, of course, any mention of the raid he himself made a month before, and he likes the Powers that Be to get all hot and bothered and do their best to get his camels back

without any trouble to him ; but he would feel rather upset if, as a result of his complaint, the police went off and shot up half a dozen of his aggressors.

Once every two or three years a big Court is held attended by Trans-Jordan, Palestine and Sinai Arabs, to make an attempt to patch up all the blood-feuds and counter-raiding. This is the most delightful thing imaginable to an Arab, as there is nothing he enjoys more than getting up in a court-room and holding forth at great length on wrongs, real or imagined. When the notice goes forth every Arab racks his brains trying to think of some incident which, properly enlarged, might serve as an excuse for getting a hearing in Court. For instance, at the last Court, which was held in February 1931 at Akaba, a Sinai Arab came forward with a complaint about his grandfather who used to act as postman between Nekhl and Suez and who was found dead in the desert one day, some fifty years previously. As may be imagined, after this lapse of time there was absolutely no evidence available, but from various inquiries I made there seemed not the slightest reason to suspect foul play, and the man had died a natural death. The grandson, however, accused the Trans-Jordan Howietat of murdering him and wished his case to be brought against the tribe without the slightest trace of evidence. Needless to say, the time of the Court was not wasted over this matter, but I have no doubt that fifty years hence the great-great-grandson will raise the case again.

Owing to the absence of essential witnesses, who



have not been warned to attend or have failed to put in an appearance, the settlement of an Arab case is not an easy matter, and if it is an interesting one there appears to be a marked desire on the part of all concerned not to spoil an attractive piece of litigation by ending it too soon. If an agreement is reached and the offending tribe are ordered to pay damages on a certain date and affix their seals to the contract, it is a lamentable fact that seldom if ever is this payment made unless considerable pressure is brought to bear upon them. There seems to be a general impression that an Arab's word is his bond, but if it is a question of payment in kind or money I have never known the individual or tribe make that payment willingly, however fervently they may swear at the Court that the agreement will be executed without fail.

The great difference between the Arab and the European is that to the Arab time means absolutely nothing—to the European it is a most precious thing which one cannot afford to waste. Time with us is a very important factor in our lives, and we are more or less ruled by it. At a certain hour we rise, we bathe, breakfast, go to the office, &c., &c., and on certain fixed dates we make inspections, attend functions and go on leave—in other words, we are the slaves of the clock and the almanac. The Arab possesses neither, and he has no fixed hours for meals or appointments, and time has no significance whatsoever. He will arrive at a Court five or six days late and be amazed that his dilatoriness should cause annoyance. His life is absolutely featureless, and a matter of a week either way is of



no consequence to him. I came across a case once in which a camel had been stolen, and the owners, suspecting that it had been taken to the Nile Valley, walked from Cairo to Kena, a matter of 350 miles, carefully inspecting every camel on both sides of the river till, eighteen months later, they discovered it. The camel, incidentally, was worth about £6. The perseverance shown is praiseworthy, though it suggests that the value of an Arab's time for one year is £2 ; but there is certainly something to be said for the perspicacity which enabled the men to examine possibly two hundred thousand camels and eventually find their own.

Another trait of the Arab is his conceit. Perhaps conceit is hardly the word, as he possesses a sublime and natural self-confidence and self-sufficiency which makes him think that he and his own affairs *ipso facto* must be of far more consequence than anything else in the world. He is essentially a man of one idea, and if he decides he wants a permit to carry a rifle or thinks he should be appointed sub-sheikh of a tribe, the matter at once assumes paramount importance and therefore can only be settled by the Governor himself ; and what is more, he expects the Governor to take the matter up personally to the exclusion of everything else. One may be talking to the High Commissioner or Minister of War at the moment, but this does not matter, and he will elbow the Personage on one side and volubly state his case.

The Sinai Arab has for several generations been accustomed to military Governors, with the result that he cannot understand that anyone can hold a

position of importance unless he wears uniform. Some years ago a big meeting was held on the Sinai-Palestine frontier at which the presiding official was a civilian of some eminence. There were also several police and other officers wearing uniform, and when the stately old sheikhs came up one by one to make their salaams they looked at the civilian at the head of the table and turned to greet the most imposing-looking officer. They were shooed off by excited policemen and promptly turned to the next man in uniform ; and, being pulled away from him, went in desperation to make their salaams to the sergeant on duty at the door. When it was explained to them that the presiding authority was the gentleman in the lounge suit they smiled the smile of men on whom had been played a practical joke of questionable taste. As one old sheikh explained to me afterwards, he understood that certain Englishmen did wear civilian clothes, but he thought they were invariably mining engineers or prospectors, and that Governors and those in authority must always be officers.

The hospitality of the Arab is proverbial, and he willingly shares with the traveller his last few scraps of bread, whilst his oft-repeated remark that everything he possesses is yours is meant literally. Once when ibex shooting we came across a desperately poor little Arab who possessed three dejected-looking palm trees growing in a gorge where a minute trickle of water provided irrigation. He showed us with much pride some small date plants he had grown from date stones and which he was protecting with thorn bushes from the ibex, and hanging on one of

the trees was a small bag of dates—his year's crop—*i.e.*, about six pounds. He gave me a few to try, and, like all dates grown in intense heat on poor soil, they were of remarkable flavour. I had two policeman with me, and later I discovered to my horror that they had accepted from the Arab and were carrying off with them the whole of his crop—his only visible means of subsistence. They explained rather sheepishly that the Arab had pressed them to accept the dates and they felt unable to offend him. I ran the risk of causing offence and the dates were returned, but it is more than probable that he forced them upon the next passer-by.

To refuse hospitality without good cause is an offence. On one occasion two Arabs were hurrying to attend a Court—they were probably several days late when they started—and passed the tent of a solitary Nekhlawi Arab. He called to them to dismount and take coffee, but they replied that they were pressed for time and could not wait.

"By God," said he, "you would not insult me by refusing my hospitality if I had my rifle with me."

"It would be all the same," they replied, "if you had your rifle or not. We are late for the meeting and must hurry."

They then rode off, but the Nekhlawi, feeling grossly insulted, hurried back to the tent of his cousin where he had left his rifle, and, having secured it, gave chase on a camel. On getting within range of the two Arabs he kept up a running fire till he wounded one in the leg, whereupon the other dismounted and shot him through the head. This



case, incidentally, caused a considerable amount of trouble, as such a thing as justifiable homicide does not exist in the Arab world, and, moreover, the Nekhlawi tribe considered they had been grossly insulted—to be shot through the head is bad enough, but to have one's coffee refused is unthinkable.

With all his faults there are certain attractive qualities about the Arab—some romantic suggestion of bygone days—that make him irresistible to a certain type of Englishman. To thoroughly appreciate the Arab one must be not completely matter of fact and overburdened with common-sense—in other words, if one does not completely fill the bill in Kipling's 'If'—

“ If you can dream and not make dreams your master,  
If you can think and not make thoughts your aim,”

then the Arab becomes in one's eyes not the simple-minded rather grasping child of nature he actually is, but a high-souled noble figure of romance—a misunderstood ideal of a man. Such Englishmen are apt to take the Arab too seriously—far more seriously than the Arab takes himself—and in course of time to become so imbued with the Arab cause, whatever that may be, that they are willing to sacrifice their lives for it; and this is far more than the average Arab would do himself.

The fairest way to judge the Arab is to accept him as he really is—a relic of the past. If one were to meet Richard Cœur de Lion to-day one would no doubt consider him boorish, crude and flamboyant, for the simple reason that he does not belong to the twentieth century but to the



eleventh, when standards of behaviour and morality were different. The Arab of to-day and the Arab of the Crusades is the same—he has not altered in any respect, his outlook on life generally and his mode of existence have not changed with the passage of the centuries. This is not by any means because he is too ignorant to accept what we call civilisation, but because he is thoroughly satisfied with the simple life and simple ideals of his forefathers and sees no necessity for change. He scorns the way Europeans have encumbered themselves with unnecessary household gods and belongings and tied themselves up with intricate laws and social conventions. All these things he thinks make life difficult and burdensome, and civilisation, in his eyes, is a form of serfdom—and who shall say he is wrong? He regards trains, motor-cars and aeroplanes with indifference—when he first saw them they caused him no surprise, and neither did he marvel at them. To him they were rather unnecessary noisy things that the Frangis (Europeans) were always inventing; they would not bring a man nearer to heaven, and would merely have the effect of obscuring the real issue—making his short stay in this world complicated and wearisome.

With the exception possibly of the Thibetans, the Beduin Arab is the only race that has effectually resisted the march of time. The Red Indian of America apparently had the same ideas, and successfully evaded civilisation till the spread of emigration hemmed him in on all sides and gradually absorbed and killed him; but the Arab dwells in the desert

that no man covets, and behind this natural barrier will, no doubt, continue to live his simple life till such time as science discovers that the sands of Arabia and Sinai have some at present unknown value that can be exploited—and then the Arab will vanish as did the Red Indian when oil was discovered on his reservations, and the world will know him no more.

## CHAPTER III.

## ARAB LAW AND CUSTOMS.

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."—  
GENESIS ix. 6.

ARAB law is the oldest law in the world. The laws of Moses, framed about 1500 B.C., were based almost entirely upon suggestions made to him by Jethro, the Midianite, who was sheikh of a powerful Trans-Jordan tribe in those days, and the suggestions of Jethro were roughly the outline of the then existing Arab law, the same law under which his own and the other tribes of Arabia had been ruled for countless generations. Arab law is fundamentally an ordinance framed to suit a primitive and nomad people, and the great difference between it and the laws governing civilised races to-day is that in the Arab world the unit is the tribe or family, and not the individual. In almost every country in the world the responsibility for a crime rests on the individual who committed it, but in the Arab world the responsibility rests firstly upon the tribe, secondly upon the section, thirdly upon the family, and whether the family decides to take any action against the culprit is solely a matter for them to decide.

The reason for this is more or less obvious—in a wild country like Arabia, where distances are

immense, it is usually impossible to arrest the criminal and deal with him, and an offence committed by a member of one tribe against the member of another can best be dealt with by taking joint action against the tribe; if it is an inter-tribal matter and the offence is committed by a member of a section against a member of another section, action is taken against the section; if it is a purely family affair it is for the family to decide what is done. In other words, it is no concern of the head of a tribe, or the tribe as a whole, if a man murders his brother. The family in question have lost a member and thus weakened their strength, and if they care to do this it is entirely their own affair. Normally the tribe would take no action, but in Sinai, where the Egyptian Government allow the Arab to administer his own laws, a murder is a murder whatever the circumstances, and the sheikhs are forced to take steps to bring to book the offender, even though it does not coincide with their own views.

Arab law is not framed with the idea of punishing the individual for a crime with the basic idea of preventing crime—its sole object is revenge for an offence and compensation for loss of life or property. It is essentially a law of retribution, and the Old Testament's "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," was followed out literally until recently. That is to say, if a man had an arm cut off in a fight he took steps to see that his antagonist had his arm cut off, but it was by no means necessary that the retribution should be inflicted upon the aggressor, as any other man of his tribe would



serve the purpose equally well. This sounds grossly unjust to us, but bears out the contention that Arab law recognises collective and not individual responsibility.

One day I was watching a crowd of Beduin waiting outside a corn-mill for their barley to be ground when a young Arab walked up and, without a word, felled a poor venerable old man with a savage blow over the head with his nabbut (heavy stick). The police rushed in and prevented the youth from killing the old man, which was the task he had set himself to perform, and carried him off to the lock-up. When the assault was investigated it transpired that the young man had just heard that his cousin had been killed in a fight at Nekhl and he had promptly taken revenge on the first person of the murderer's tribe he met. The fact that the poor old man had had nothing whatsoever to do with the murder, and had never even heard of it, had no bearing on the case at all. The sheikhs who assessed the case found nothing unusual in it—the aggressor had a right to take revenge, and it was merely unfortunate that the first member of the guilty tribe he met should be an old man.

This is Arab law in its primitive form, and, though the Egyptian Government as far as possible countenances Arab customs, an unprovoked assault of this description is not allowed to go unpunished (if it occurs at the very door of the police station).

The question of restitution for animals stolen in raids was simply settled by the seizure of a similar number of animals, plus an additional

number for the insult, from the raiding tribe. This system still pertains in tribes in the wildest parts of Sinai and Trans-Jordan where, owing to a weak inefficient sheikh, there is little or no discipline and organisation; but normally the Arab of to-day has realised that the rough-and-ready system of instant retaliation has its drawbacks, and prefers that his cases should be formally tried before assessors, as otherwise the general insecurity that would prevail would cause even a nomad Arab discomfort.

A blood-feud has its attractive side in its early stages, but it becomes wearisome, not to say dangerous, when instead of one life to avenge the list mounts up to ten or twelve, and the Arab, realising that unchecked blood-feuds might ultimately lead to extermination, introduced the system of payment of fines. These fines, however, are not inflicted to act as a deterrent to crime or as a punishment, but are merely a compensation for loss sustained, plus the insult, to avoid the necessity of a counter-raid or counter-murder. A life in Sinai at the present time is assessed at forty camels—*i.e.*, £200; the value fluctuates somewhat with the rise and fall of market prices and the reasons for the murder, but the compensation is usually about that figure. For a leg lost in a fight it is £75, for an eye £120, for an arm £100, and for a stolen wife £200.

Payment is nearly always made in camels, and this makes the case more intricate and interesting, as the sheikhs allot the fine in so many camels of four years, so many of three years, and so many

she-camels, &c. The actual market values of these camels is too well known to all concerned to admit of argument at the time, but it greatly adds to the confusion later, as, when payment is made, the actual age of every camel is hotly disputed, as may well be imagined. Occasionally in a case of murder the judgment is given in slaves: the defendant is ordered to hand over an ABD (slave) and a Ghurra (girl), plus a certain number of camels. This is merely a relic of the past given for effect, and is never enforced, as it is an understood thing that a slave means five camels worth £3 each, and a girl five camels worth £5. In the past the Sinai Arabs maintained a considerable number of black slaves that they purchased in Arabia. These slaves still exist and live with the tribes as free men who own land and camels, but they are not treated by the Arabs as being on the same plane as themselves, and are regarded as being 'below the salt.'

The normal constitution of an Arab or Orfi Court is a head sheikh as supreme judge and two other sheikhs appointed by the tribes concerned, all three being chosen from other tribes with the idea of getting an impartial judgment. This is the laudable idea, but biassed judges are not unheard of in Europe and are also to be found in the East. The hearing of the case is very similar to that of an ordinary lawsuit in England—the plaintiff gives his evidence and calls his witnesses, who are cross-examined by the other side. The cross-examination usually consists of a shouting match, and there is seldom any attempt



to make a witness refute his own statement by clever questioning. The judges, however, realise that the case will not be settled till everyone has had his say and is completely exhausted, and therefore the latitude allowed everybody is considerable. The salient points in the evidence are carefully noted, and as usually the detailed facts of the case are fully known to everyone, the verdict of guilty or not guilty seldom presents any difficulty—the really intricate part of the judgment consists in assessing the compensation or fine to the satisfaction of all concerned. This is the system employed by Arabs when trying their own cases, but in Sinai, where the Government recognises Arab Courts, an officer sits as supreme judge to conduct the case generally and see that no miscarriage of justice occurs.

In cases where there is doubt as to the guilt of the accused, recourse is had to swearing on the Koran, but unfortunately this oath is seldom accepted as an Arab will cheerfully give false evidence after swearing on the Koran, and incidentally the same thing frequently happens in England where the oath is taken on the Bible. In the Libyan Desert the difficulty is overcome by making the accused party take the oath at some sheikh's tomb. The Libyan Desert is dotted with the tombs of sheikhs whose reputation for piety has remained long after the history of their lives has been forgotten, and such is the respect in which they are held that only the most hardened criminal will take an oath and give false evidence at a tomb. An accused party with considerable



bluster will agree to give the oath at any tomb selected, but when the critical moment arrives he will evade the issue and explain that he must hurry back to his camp, as his camel strayed that morning, and that he will return in two or three days' time and take the oath. In Sinai there are very few sheikhs' tombs, and in any case an oath taken on them has no significance, as swearing on a tomb is not a Sinai custom. The Sinai Arab pins his faith on the Bishaa, an interesting relic of the trial by ordeal.

If the accused in a case maintains his innocence and it is impossible to prove his guilt by means of witnesses, he is asked if he will accept the Bishaa, and if so a date is fixed for the test. By accepting the ordeal he makes himself liable if found guilty to four times the normal compensation fixed for the offence, but to refuse the test is tantamount to a confession of guilt, so the unfortunate man has no alternative. The Arab charged with administering the ordeal is called the Sheikh of the Bishaa, and the office is a hereditary one, held at the present time by a diminutive old man of the Ayada tribe. He exacts a fee of £10 for his services, and what is more sees that the money is paid before the ordeal begins.

The ceremony opens with the heating of a heavy iron ladle over an open wood fire, where it remains until it is white-hot, when it is passed round to the assessors, who have to certify that its condition is satisfactory. The accused then steps forward and is given a cup of water with which to rinse his mouth. The ladle is held out to him and,

bending forward, he licks it with his naked tongue three times. He then submits his tongue to the Sheikh of the Bishaa and the three assessors for inspection, and if they detect any sign of burning the accused is found guilty ; if, on the other hand, the tongue is unmarked he is declared not guilty and "leaves the Court without a stain on his character."

This ordeal appears at first sight to be a brutal and primitive ceremony, with nothing to recommend it, but it is based on a certain amount of common-sense, as the Arabs contend that if a man is guilty he knows that he will be burned and his mouth becomes dry with fright, so that this actually happens. If, on the other hand, the man is not guilty he has no fear, and his mouth and tongue have the normal amount of saliva that effectually prevents burning.

I have myself seen the Bishaa test when a man licked a spoon three times, and the spoon was so hot that one could not bear one's hand within three inches of it. On this occasion the man's tongue showed no signs of burning except a very slight redness, and he was found not guilty. Whether the tongue developed a huge blister the following day I cannot say, but from the terrific heat of the ladle I expected that the tongue would stick to it and be badly seared.

The Bishaa, however, is far too primitive and brutal for a civilised Government like Egypt's to accept, and therefore in difficult cases the truth has to be arrived at by more ordinary methods, and this is not always easy. An oath that the

Arab usually respects is the three divorces, but this also is forbidden. This consists of saying three times, "I divorce my wife," and if the evidence given is false the divorce is a *fait accompli*. Incidentally, it is not a bit of use applying this oath to a man who possesses an old and ugly wife he wishes to get rid of, but it is most binding with an old man who has recently married a young girl who would be only too glad of an excuse to get away from him.

This is roughly the outline of Arab law, and the Egyptian Government, realising that it could not administer a wilderness like Sinai and maintain public security by the ordinary police methods, passed by Khedival decree the Sinai law of 1911, which gave Arab Courts the "authority to give judgment in accordance with well-established local usage and custom, save in so far as the same should be contrary to equity or good conscience." This was a very clever move, as on the face of it it appears to be a great concession granted in a liberal manner by the Government, and the Arab has never yet grasped that "what he gained on the swings he lost on the roundabouts." The Arab is perfectly satisfied, as it gives him the right to administer his own laws and abide by his age-old customs, but he does not appear to have realised that the Government had no other alternative, as it is impossible to maintain public security in a desert unless one adopts the system of making the sheikh and tribe responsible for the misdeeds of the individual.

By granting this concession, and allowing Arab



law, the Government also accepted the system of tribal responsibility, and this system, which the Arab considers perfectly fair and just, is used by the Government against the Arab when necessary. The Government says, and very rightly, "If you are raided or have a man murdered you do not worry about the criminal but hold the tribe responsible, and we agree; but at the same time if an individual should commit a crime against the Government we shall not worry about that individual, but shall hold the sheikh and the whole tribe liable." So far the Arab has never grasped that he received only a very small concession, and in return for this placed himself absolutely in the hands of the Government. The result is all to the good, as, by holding the sheikh and tribe fully responsible, the Government can administer Sinai without any difficulty and maintain the most perfect public security with a very small police force.

The efficiency of the Sinai system was proved by what happened in Palestine after the war. History always repeats itself; and one of the aftermaths of every war that has occurred has been an outbreak of brigandage at the conclusion of hostilities. Just as Palestine had settled down to a period of prosperity in 1921, gangs of Arab highwaymen appeared in all parts of the country and proceeded to hold up caravans and passing travellers, shooting indiscriminately if the slightest hesitation to 'hands up' was shown. Ordinary police methods were useless, as the bands broke up after each outrage and returned to their tents,



and even when the Secret Service discovered the names of the culprits arrests could never be effected, as the wanted men were warned or hidden by their relatives. Hunting for a wanted Arab in the desert is very much like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack, and even if hundreds of police are employed the criminal has little to fear, as every Arab is instinctively 'ag'in the Government,' and can be relied upon to do all in his power to assist the fugitive. Moreover, it is the unwritten law of the Arab world that a fugitive from justice, or from the wrath of his own tribe, takes refuge with his hereditary enemies, and those enemies are bound by Arab laws of hospitality to harbour him and give him every assistance.

The situation went from bad to worse, and then the Palestine authorities began to wonder how public security was maintained in Sinai where there were even greater facilities for evading the police. The answer was, "By the system of holding the sheikh and tribe responsible." "But," said they, "this means the punishment of men who are innocent, and the British Government would never countenance that."

Incidentally, one cannot call a tribe innocent if it is an accessory both before and after the fact, and as there is nothing secret in the Arab world the whole tribe, who are cognisant of the crimes of their bad men and who actively assist in their escape from justice, are just as guilty as the actual criminals.

So the Palestine Government eventually persuaded the Colonial Office to pass the Arab Ordinance

which, whatever it may appear to be on the face of it, is the application of tribal responsibility and nothing else—and banditry ceased in a few months. There is no moral objection to the system, as it is a code the Arab willingly accepts and himself applies, and if in return he is allowed to settle his own squabbles in his own way he has not the slightest objection to the Government using it as a lever against him.

The system of applying this law is simple: if a robbery or murder of a merchant or traveller occurs in the desert, the sheikh of the tribe that owns the darak (area) is sent for and asked for an explanation. If the crime has been committed by an Arab of another tribe he will know all about it and will be only too glad to give the name and full particulars, and assist the Government in every way, as he will regard it rather naturally as an attempt to fix the responsibility for the crime on him and his tribe. If, on the other hand, his own tribe is responsible, he will pretend to be ignorant of the whole affair but will admit that it is *gaiz* (possible). The authorities tell him that he as sheikh is responsible and must produce the criminal, otherwise he will be fined the equal of the blood-money and be discharged from his sheikhship. The onus of finding and arresting the man is thus shifted from the Government, who would most probably be unable to do it, to the sheikh, who must either find the man or take the blame himself. An efficient sheikh knows the exact movements of all his tribe, and by exerting pressure himself and passing on the responsibility to the sections and subsections

has very little difficulty in producing the man. To make the sheikhship an attractive office the sheikhs are paid a monthly salary of from £3 to £5, and from time to time receive decorations and robes and swords of honour. They also have the ear of the Governor, and are encouraged in every way to enable them to exert their authority and generally administer their tribes.

The application of Arab law concerns purely Arab cases alone, and the Government have decreed that if the crime be committed against a non-Arab the criminal will be liable to be tried and dealt with according to the laws of Egypt. This is very necessary, as murders and raids among the Arabs themselves are not of great importance to the administration of the country, but interference with and robbery of merchants who pass through in caravans is a serious matter and has to be met with severity.

A difficult case occurred some years ago in Sinai when, as the result of a lawsuit over land, an Arab of the Sawarka tribe turned bandit and raided the Arishia of El Arish, who are not Arabs. The sheikh when sent for admitted that the man, Mohammed Abu Mahdi, had carried out the raids, but said that he had left the tribe and was living north of Akaba with the Howietat. This was true, and it was also quite true that, the Howietat being the enemies of the Sawarka, the sheikh could not go into their country to arrest him. Things were at an impasse when the Arishia, who had been raided six times or more, asked that the case be tried by Orfi or Arab Court. This was done, and



in the absence of the accused the tribe were ordered to pay the value of everything stolen, plus five camels fine for each raid. After much complaining the money was paid over, and I heard unofficially that Abu Mahdi had a considerable amount of land and palm trees and that the tribe had seized some of his property and compensated themselves.

Abu Mahdi, however, continued to come up from Akaba and make raids, and every raid was settled by Orfi in the same way. Then the raids ceased, and one day a letter was received from Abu Mahdi saying that he would surrender if the fact that he had given himself up of his own accord was taken into consideration when he was tried. This was agreed to, and he returned to suffer six months imprisonment, which was a very light sentence considering the trouble he had caused; but there were certain factors in the case which had to be put to his credit—one was that in all his raids he had never committed a murder or even used violence. This, incidentally, was due more to the character of the Arishia than anything else, as they are not a very courageous race and one small Arab can hold up and rob three of them with ease. The other factor was that he said he had lost heavily over the business—the Arishia had reported in every raid that they had been robbed of two or three valuable riding camels, £20 or £30 in cash, rolls of cloth, &c., whereas, as Abu Mahdi explained, they were a maskeen (miserable) lot, the camels he had got were half the number reported and of little value, he had never found more than five shillings on his victims, and the rolls of cloth



were figments of the imagination. In other words, the artful Arishia had discovered a novel method of turning a disaster into a 500 per cent profit.

About six months later a young Arab of another tribe wounded his cousin in a fight, and when ordered by his father to come in for trial refused to do so and went off swearing to have his revenge on all and sundry. Three days afterwards one of the Arishia, who had profited so well over the Abu Mahdi case, came in and reported that he had been attacked by the young Arab and robbed of a fine riding camel worth £25 and £10 in gold. The old father, when asked for an explanation, denied it absolutely. He admitted that his son had gone 'Bolshie,' but said he had run off to Trans-Jordan and could not possibly have committed the crime. Then another Arab came in and said the Arishy's camel had not been stolen but had died on the road, so a police patrol was sent off to identify the body and report. They came back with the story that the Arishy's camel had died on the march, and produced witnesses to prove they had seen the owner with it when it died. The Arishy then stood his trial for attempting to obtain money by false pretences and received a year's imprisonment, which horrified him, as he had regarded his action as a perfectly legitimate and profitable method of obtaining money. The Arabs, on the other hand, were delighted at seeing one of their rapacious neighbours hoist with his own petard, and the punishment had a most marked effect on all concerned.

The Arab laws regarding women are wise, but

do not err on the side of leniency. The evidence of women with regard to assaults on themselves is accepted without corroboration in any way. The reason for this is that the women act as shepherds and fetch water, and are therefore accustomed to move about in the desert alone. If interference with women became general the whole fabric of Arab life would crumble—in other words, the Arab himself would have to do most of the work and his passion for litigation would suffer in consequence—an unthinkable situation.

The fine for rape is £100 if the assault occurs during the daytime, but only half that amount if it occurs at night. The reason for this is not so obvious, but is very sound—a girl may be alone and unprotected during the day, but at night she should be in the tent with her family, and if she is not—well, it is more or less her own fault.

Co-responsdency, or the act of running off with another man's wife, generally leads to murder, and the injured husband has four days in which to avenge the insult, during which time he may kill the co-respondent or any member of his family. Gay Lotharios are therefore not popular in the family circle any more than they are in England. In England the Lothario addicted to dalliance with other men's wives only brings discredit on his family, and not a very marked amount of that at the present time, but if Arab law obtained, one can imagine the anxiety the male members of his family would feel every time he found an attractive and responsive married lady—one can see them barricading themselves in the house for four days

after the elopement of the couple and ringing continually on the telephone for police protection.

If vengeance is carried out no compensation is paid, and the co-respondent, if he has escaped, does very well out of it—he has captured the lady of his heart and his cousin, whom he probably disliked, has stopped a bullet ; and it is quite possible that the villain of the piece will inherit his property. Usually, however, the Arab shows some sense over vengeance for the loss of his wife, and either kills the co-respondent or—if he cannot perform the deed in the four days allowed—sues for the £200. Incidentally, the Egyptian Government does not countenance retaliation of this description, and whenever possible intervenes and forces the Arab to accept compensation in lieu of revenge. The desire of the Government in all cases of murder, or issues where the Arab would exact a life as a penalty, is at all costs to prevent a blood-feud from spreading. If action is not taken at once the relatives of the dead man will take revenge. If they kill the actual murderer or offender the solution is simple, as the Arab has enough common-sense to realise that this is ordinary justice and the case can be settled without difficulty ; if, on the other hand, they kill the first man of the offending tribe they meet, which usually happens, as the murderer has fled to Trans-Jordan or the Hedjaz till the trouble has blown over, then in a very short time a big blood-feud will start.

Directly a murder is reported the police are instructed to bring in all the victim's relatives to headquarters. As a matter of form a search is made



for the murderer, but this is always a forlorn hope, as he is invariably well away across the border before the body is discovered. The really important people to get are the relatives of the dead man, as they matter far more than the accused. If the relatives are safe under police supervision the situation is more or less in hand ; but the danger is not over till the relatives of the murderer are also in. In rare cases, if the feeling is very strong, the relatives of the murderer are placed in prison cells at night at their own request. The respective sheikhs are then sent for and informed that a sulh (truce) must be made, and the relatives of the dead man must swear that they will take no action till the case is tried six months later.

A date a considerable distance ahead is always chosen to allow the feeling to die down and the hot heads to cool off. This arrangement of a truce takes time, as the relatives are naturally furious and flatly refuse to be bound by any such conditions, swearing they will have a life for a life. Meetings are held day after day without result ; but the relatives of both parties, though not under arrest, are under close police supervision, and are not allowed to return to the desert. Neither are the sheikhs permitted to leave. Various excuses are made and urgent private affairs quoted, but the Government remain adamant—the sheikhs and the parties concerned stay at headquarters till a truce is proclaimed, even if it takes a year. At last the injured parties, realising that they are powerless, reluctantly consent to sign the agreement, whilst the sheikhs make damanas (guarantees)



for quite substantial amounts that the peace will not be broken.

Six months later, when the case comes on, the injured tribe are quite amenable, and unless the murder is a particularly bad one there is little difficulty in arranging the *deeya* (blood-money), which is normally fixed at £200, payable in camels of different values on different dates. If an injured party has accepted the truce and received the blood-money and then commits murder in revenge, he runs up against a lot of trouble, as he has broken the Arab law and is liable to four times the ordinary blood-money, whilst the Government steps in and says: "Look here, you sheikhs, we gave you this Arab law as a great concession, but if your people deliberately defy its judgments it is a dead letter, and we shall have to withdraw the right to try cases according to your ordinance, and must apply the ordinary criminal laws of Egypt." This always has the required effect, and the culprit is treated as a pariah who has let the Arab race down, and the Government give a stiff sentence of imprisonment, not for the murder but for breaking the law.

It might be argued, why is not the murderer tried and sentenced to death as he would be in any ordinary country? The reasons are three: in the first place, as a murderer invariably crosses over to the Hedjaz or Trans-Jordan, it might be years before he was arrested; whilst the police were trying to capture the criminal the relatives of the dead man would have retaliated by another murder and a blood-feud would be in progress; and if a criminal is sentenced to death or to penal

servitude and dies in prison—and the Arab invariably dies if he receives a long sentence—his tribe consider that he has been actually killed by the tribe who caused him to be punished and take revenge. So the salutary punishment of hanging, which checks murder in most countries, would merely have the effect of reopening blood-feuds and causing the loss of many lives if applied to the Arabs.

Some years ago a young Teaha Arab was brutally murdered by a Terrabin and the Government quite failed to patch up a peace, as not only did the murderer disappear totally, but the father of the dead boy also, and without the father no truce could be made. Three years later the dead body of the Terrabin was found in a wadi with a huge wound in the throat. Whilst investigations were being made an old Arab walked into my office with a rapturous smile on his face. "I killed him," he said. "He murdered my son three years ago, and ever since I have been following him through the Hedjaz and Trans-Jordan. I am an old man and could not hope to kill him in open fight, but he was clever and never slept alone, for he suspected I was following him. Five nights ago I caught him sleeping alone in a wadi. I crawled up to him and knelt with my knife at his throat and said, 'Wake up and die, as you killed my son,' and then I struck. Now you can do what you will, as I am satisfied."

Later on, in the course of the investigations, he was asked why, if he desired revenge, he had not according to custom killed any man of the

offending tribe, and he replied that he did not desire the death of any innocent person but wished only to kill the man who had murdered his son in cold blood. If Arabs all saw things in the same light, administration of these difficult people would be far easier than it is. This was a clear case of a life for a life, and so far as the Arabs were concerned it was settled. Normally the Government would have punished the man for taking the law into his own hands, but the factors of the case were taken into consideration, and as he was a very old man, near death through the hardships he had undergone while following his son's murderer for three years, he was allowed to depart.

A life lost, whatever the circumstances, is a life taken, and a pure accident ranks as a murder, though in a lesser degree. The fine inflicted for death by misadventure when it is the fault of some individual is half that of murder—*i.e.*, £100. Accidental deaths are not unusual, as Arabs are notoriously careless with rifles and they are left about at night loaded and fully cocked, so that they are frequently knocked down and exploded.

An Arab policeman was taking coffee with some friends, and whilst drinking allowed his rifle to drop—the bullet severed the femoral artery of an Arab near-by and killed him. The policeman received three months' imprisonment for gross neglect of arms, and when he came out asked that he might have his case tried by Orfi, as otherwise he was afraid the Arabs would kill him. This was entirely his own affair, as, so far as the Government was concerned, he had expiated his offence by



serving three months, but he willingly attended the Arab Court and paid the sum of £100 to the relatives.

There was nothing to take exception to in this, as it was nothing more than reasonable compensation for a life lost by gross carelessness, but the Arabs for some time had an idea that a policeman was bound by ordinary Arab laws and was responsible for a man killed in a smuggling affray or raid. It had to be pointed out to them most emphatically that a life lost when the police were in the execution of their duty was a very different matter, and that the Government accepted full responsibility; that any attempt to take revenge on a policeman for the death of a smuggler would mean not only the repudiation of Arab customs but the imprisonment of the sheikh and the relentless hunting down of the criminals, who eventually would be well and truly hanged. They are still unable to see it in quite the same light, but they realise that the Government would be as good as its word, and they will always remember the fate of four Arishia who murdered a Bash Shawish (colour-sergeant) and who suffered the extreme penalty. The story of this murder is so interesting, and presents such a picture of Eastern life, that I deal with it later in a special chapter.



## CHAPTER IV.

## ARAB LAW (CIVIL).

"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."—  
PROVERBS xxii. 28.

THE Egyptian Government does not recognise ownership of desert land by Arabs, but merely allows them rights of cultivation. To all intents and purposes this amounts to actual ownership, but the Government reserves to itself the right to claim land as Crown property in the event of its being required for public purposes, or becoming of considerable value through the extension of the irrigation system. All land in Sinai is held by what is called Wada el Yed, the exact meaning of which is permanent right of cultivation acquired by fifteen years' occupation.

Normally the land is of little value, but the Arab feels the sense of ownership very keenly, and will fight as energetically for his rights over some particularly useless bit of desert as he will over a plot capable of raising first-class corn and melon crops. Every inch of the desert is claimed by somebody, and a prospecting party has only to start a bore or shift a few feet of surface soil for the landlord to arrive out of the blue and ask what sort of com-

pensation he is to get. This is where the reservation of Government ownership comes in useful, as no claims are entertained unless the land has actual value and the cultivator suffers actual loss. Nevertheless, the Arab owner continues to hang around, and it is usually found advisable to employ him as ghaffir in case the mine or oil-bore is proceeded with.

A ghaffir is a watchman who is responsible for the safety of the property he is employed to watch. Actually he does very little watching and waxes very fat and lazy on a well-paid job that calls for no exertion, but as he is recognised by other Arabs as being the owner of the land the property is usually quite safe, and in the event of a theft the ghaffir can be called upon to make good the loss from his wages.

The Arabs carry with them in little leather bags the hogas (deeds) that prove their right to land. These documents, which are usually half illegible and caked with dirt, are by no means easy to decipher, and the description of the boundaries of the plots are delightfully vague. Quite recently the Sinai Arabs and inhabitants of El Arish discovered that by erecting nets along the sea-shore of the Mediterranean they could catch enormous numbers of migrating quail, which fetched a high price in Port Said, where merchants exported them to the Continent.

Previously the land along the shore had for the most part been of no value whatsoever, but with the advent of this trade it suddenly became worth about £40 a kilometre. Very few people had taken

the trouble to possess hogas, as the land did not justify the expense of paying the official letter-writers the fee for writing them out, but this difficulty was easily overcome. Hogas of great antiquity were faked most cleverly by the scribes of El Arish, and stretches of land were sold by a variety of 'owners' to different purchasers, whilst some of the keener financial brains sold the same land to two or three different individuals.

The hearing of the cases that ensued took years to settle, owing to the absolute impossibility of deciding who was the actual owner, and, even if that difficulty were overcome, it was beyond the powers of any judge to define the limits when the boundaries given were "north the sea, south a sandy area, west a sandy area with bushes, and east the land of Said Abdulla." The only boundary that looked in any way definite was the east, but in all probability Said Abdulla's land was the subject of another equally intricate case, and the result was chaos. After a number of hard-working officials had been reduced to physical wrecks, it was decided in all cases where it was found impossible to give a judgment that the Government should take the land and let it by auction to the highest bidder. This at once solved the difficulty, as the litigants, realising that neither would benefit if the case went further, invariably settled the matter by coming to a mutual arrangement.

A very large proportion of the best land in Northern Sinai has been acquired by the Arishia of El Arish. These people, who are of mixed origin, have little or no Arab blood in them



and are very hard-working and intelligent. Their methods of acquiring land, however, are open to question, and the fact that pride of ownership deters the Arab from making a direct sale of his rights hinders the Government in its well-meant efforts to put transfer of land on a satisfactory basis. If Mohammed, an Arishy, desires a piece of corn-land owned by an Arab, he does not make an offer for its purchase, but if the Arab is short of money arranges a loan for a mortgage on the land. The Arab signs the document and very seldom finds himself in a position to repay the loan, as a mortgage on land in Sinai means that the mortgagee cultivates and pays a quarter-share to the owner. This state of affairs continues indefinitely, but if by chance the Arab owner some years later finds himself in a position to pay off the loan, he is staggered to discover that the deed he signed is not a mortgage but a deed of sale, and that the amount he actually received as a loan has no resemblance whatsoever to the amount that figures in the deed as purchase price. To protect the Arab, who can neither read nor write, from frauds of this description, there is an order that no deeds will be recognised unless examined and stamped by a Government stamp, but a purchaser, who is artful enough to make out a mortgage as a deed of sale and multiplies the amount paid by ten, is quite capable of forging the date and showing the transaction as having taken place prior to the order.

Another very favourite method of acquiring land is by means of the 'grocer's bill.' An Arishy



desiring a certain plot or series of plots moves into the area with a tent and some simple groceries, and allows the Arabs to run up bills on the security of their land. It is a regrettable fact that there appear to be more clerical errors in grocers' bills than in any other of the accounts we are called upon to settle, and these clerical errors almost invariably are in favour of the grocer. The Arishy grocers' bills are a concentrated mass of 'clerical errors,' and no Arab has ever found his banking account equal to the strain. The result is that land worth probably £40 is acquired by the Arishy on the strength of a bill of £7 or so, which he has rendered for about £3-worth of tea, sugar and flour. It is very difficult to protect the Arab, as he is naturally secretive and prefers to do business in a hole-and-corner way, and affixes his seal cheerfully to documents which he cannot understand and has taken no steps to have explained to him.

Recently the Government instituted an irrigation scheme in a valley by means of which land previously worth about £1 per acre increased in value to £20 per acre. It was pointed out to the Arabs that they lacked the knowledge and energy to make full use of this irrigated land, and they were advised to sell through the Government, or to let the land to Arishia on leases approved by the legal officials. This they flatly refused to do, and proceeded to enter into intricate mortgages and lease of land on a quarter the yield, &c., with the result that in three years the Arishia have acquired practically all the property at one-third its value.





Tribe of Arabs with their Sheikhs on their way to attend a land lawsu't.

It is no easy matter to help a race who refuse to be helped, and who prefer to be cheated out of their land than to sell it outright for a fair price.

Apparently the Arab takes far more interest in the question of tribal ownership of land than in his personal holdings. The difficulty over private cases is that the Arab submits to being swindled, and seldom makes any attempt to refute the claims of the man who has obtained possession of his property; but if, on the other hand, there is an inter-tribal squabble over some absolutely worthless tract that has no value for either cultivation or grazing, the two tribes complete with sheikhs will turn up for the hearing. As it is impossible to settle these cases without seeing the land, it is necessary to hear the suit on the spot, and there is some difficulty over the selection of the actual site for the hearing, as neither tribe will willingly budge from the line they contend is the boundary. They pretend to think that, if the evidence is heard some hundred yards or so within the line they state is the limit of their area, they have *ipso facto* forfeited a right to it. This, incidentally, is mere by-play, and done with the idea of impressing the adjudicator with the seriousness with which they regard their claim.

The proceedings start early in the morning with the calling of witnesses, but as there is absolutely no evidence regarding cultivation, boundary-marks, or any other proofs of occupation, the official charged with the hearing of the case can find nothing whatsoever to help him in forming an opinion. The system I always adopt when the land is of



no value and possesses neither wells, grazing, nor firewood, is to allow the case to go on till sunset, and then, when every voice has cracked with shouting, with an air of great wisdom give judgment that the boundary shall be exactly half-way between the two points under discussion. This is invariably greeted as a judgment such as no ordinary man could possibly arrive at, and everyone is delighted till the order goes forth that the two tribes, under the supervision of the police, will at once proceed to raise six-foot cairns of stone along the new line, so that in future there will be no further cause for disagreement. This is always regarded as not being in the best possible taste, as a very pleasant day is ruined at the close by two or three hours' hard labour. It, however, acts as a deterrent, as a tribe will think twice about raising the question of a boundary if it means they have to delimitate the new line by the raising of stone cairns or the digging of a ditch.

In Northern Sinai boundary-marks are usually marked by a row of asphodel, or clumps of a species of cactus called sobeih. In lieu of cement and concrete pillars, these plants make very satisfactory marks, as they cannot very well be removed without the asphodel or cactus showing distinct signs of replanting. Removal of a neighbour's boundary-marks was one of the offences that Moses had to guard against three thousand odd years ago, and it has not lost its popularity since. I have had to deal with cases when boundary-marks had been moved the night before, with the fresh soil showing on the surface, and in one quail-netting case, where

the deed stated the eastern limit was an old marble column, I found a portion of a ship's mast that had been erected a few minutes before my arrival, and which the plaintiffs stoutly maintained was the marble column referred to. On these occasions it is difficult to decide whether one is more annoyed by the wilful perversion of the truth or the low standard at which one's intelligence is assessed by the litigants.

The laws regarding riparian rights are among the most intricate and difficult of all ordinances, and it might be assumed that Sinai, being a wilderness, would be free from suits of this description; but this unfortunately is not the case. The Wadi El Arish, which carries off practically all the rainfall of Central Sinai, is extensively used for irrigating plots of land when the floods come down in winter, and there are constant complaints from landowners that their neighbours have erected barriers and trenches that prevent the water from reaching the cultivation. One case, which is still under discussion, concerns a bargain made by an Arishy by which he undertook to construct a dam and a water-channel that would irrigate eight plots of land, if the Arab owners in return would pay him one-quarter of the resulting yield in corn. All went well for a few years, and the dam was an unqualified success. Then one of the landowners died and his nephew inherited his plot. The plot in question lies in the centre of the land irrigated by the dam, and the nephew with considerable cunning repudiated the arrangement, which he said was not made by him, and told the owner

of the dam to cut the water off, as he preferred to be without it. This could not be done without also cutting off the water from four of the other landowners, a situation which was apparent to the nephew of the dead man from the first. This bears out the contention that, though the Arab cultivates an air of stupidity, he has really a very first-class brain when he cares to use it, and is by no means slow to grasp a weak spot in an opponent's armour.

One of the greatest difficulties experienced in trying civil suits is the lack of candour shown by both sides, and the attempt to withhold the full truth from the Court because of certain details that the litigants imagine might prejudice their suit. There was one case of a contract made with a European firm to dig up and transport a pipe-line left by the British Army after the war. It was a big undertaking and Youssef, who accepted the contract, admitted two cousins, Shakir and Ahmed, into partnership. The job was a lucrative one, which they carried out satisfactorily, and later the firm asked them to undertake also the work of removing pumping machinery. Shakir and Ahmed agreed, but Youssef, the originator of the scheme, objected, saying they would lose over it. There was a heated meeting, at the conclusion of which Youssef said he would leave the syndicate and have nothing more to do with it. The two cousins said he could leave if he wished, but if he resigned he resigned for good and had no further claims. Youssef swore by the three divorces that so far as he was concerned the partnership was dissolved—



this meant that if he broke his word he had divorced his wife.

The other two continued the work and made a most successful thing of it, whereupon Youssef returned and claimed his share. The result was a very puzzling lawsuit, during which Shakir and Ahmed stoutly maintained that Youssef had had nothing whatsoever to do with the work, and had, in fact, been away in Palestine the whole of the time it was carried out. Youssef proved by documents that he had actually received from the firm the weekly payments made for work completed, and it was only after hours of cross-examination that Shakir and Ahmed admitted reluctantly that as the original contract had been made in Youssef's name, he was the only one who could draw the money, and they had asked him as a favour to do so, never thinking for a moment that he would later claim a share. The admission did not damage their case in the slightest, as it merely went to prove that Youssef was a shady and crooked character, but by their foolish suppression of facts they very nearly lost the case.

There is an old-established custom in the Arab world—which dates back to the time when there was no public security or police work—for all travellers, prospectors, &c., to hire camels, guides and workmen from the tribe in whose darak (area) they are journeying. The scheme had much to recommend it in the old days, as it meant that the sheikh of the tribe accepted full responsibility for the safety of the traveller and his goods. At the present time, though it is recognised that Arabs



have a moral right to supply transport, they cannot insist upon it, and if the Government so wishes, a visitor, prospector, or surveyor may hire his camels as he pleases. The reason for this is that some years ago Government surveyors engaged in making a map of Southern Sinai were driven frantic by the avariciousness and pertinacity of the tribes. It had been arranged beforehand that at certain stages of their work they should change their caravan of camels from the Mezeina to the Terrabin and from the Terrabin to the Lehewat, &c., so that each tribe concerned should get a fair share of the work ; but the system was disgracefully abused. The unfortunate surveyor, having wasted two or three days getting suitable camels to carry his kit—for the Arab will cheerfully turn up with a caravan of animals half of which are quite incapable of carrying a load and with saddles and ropes in a most dilapidated condition,—would find himself after a week's work assailed by a mob from some other tribe who would insist that the work had now entered into their area.

The surveyor found that not only had he to map the country, but he had also to hold Courts to discover the exact boundaries of the Arab daraks, and, as the Arab is not normally a truthful man and over all questions of areas lies with dignity and precision, the task was incidentally more than he could manage. Moreover, the loading up and packing of a surveyor's or prospector's kit is not a job learned in a day, and it is particularly trying when one has got a caravan working efficiently with selected camels to have to change it for a

mob of under-aged and weakly camels not up to their work, and equipped with antiquated and unserviceable saddles.

There are twenty different tribes of Arabs in Sinai—some of them being only small offshoot settlements from the big tribes of Arabia who have during the last eighty years trickled in across the frontier and established themselves in the Peninsula—so that the delimitation of all their daraks is a lengthy and intricate business. The boundaries are roughly known and are marked on a map, but it is very difficult when a prospector or oil-borer starts work anywhere near a border-line to decide to which tribe the area belongs. The system of drawing a straight line between two points does not give satisfaction, as Arab boundaries usually follow the course of wadis (valleys), and, moreover, the respective sheikhs, like the old Turkish Government, are averse to a hard and fast frontier, and prefer something vague and undecided, so that if anything profitable should turn up on the boundary, there need be no limit to their claims. A tribe will quite cheerfully swear as one man that their darak extends some twenty or thirty miles beyond its actual limit if they think that thereby they can obtain compensation and the employment of a ghaffir (watchman) from a mining or prospecting company who have started work.

With reference to the Turkish Government, it may be recalled that, previous to the occupation of Egypt after the Arabi rebellion, neither the Sinai nor Western Desert frontiers had ever been

defined. In Sinai, though it was generally accepted that the line lay as it does now between Rafa and Taba, the Turks claimed that their empire extended to within twenty miles of Suez, though they made no attempt to control or administer the country. In 1908 they pushed their patrols into Sinai and occupied Nueiba—an incident which almost led to hostilities between Turkey and Great Britain. The presence of British warships in the Gulf of Akaba brought the Turks to their senses, and a Frontier Commission, in which Great Britain and Egypt were represented by Colonel Owen Pasha, definitely decided the frontier and marked it with concrete pillars every ten kilometres or so. The Western Desert Frontier, which was equally vague, would have led no doubt to a further incident, but the Italo-Turkish war in Tripoli intervened, and the late Colonel Hunter Pasha, at Kitchener's orders, occupied Sollum during this war, and thus very clearly and decisively fixed the western frontier for all time.

When settling the question of a disputed boundary, it is helpful to think of some unpleasant duty that the land in question may carry with it. For instance, a sheikh and his tribe, imagining that there might be some money to be earned when the Suez-Jerusalem road was started, made a most impudent claim that this area belonged to them, as in the days when the pilgrims travelled to Mecca across Sinai the sheikh was responsible for their safety on the first part of the journey. It was perfectly obvious, however, that this was a cold and calculating lie, and the officer dealing with the case said



he was very glad to find that someone claimed the area, as some Arabs had torn up a length of stone road, and the cost of repairs would have to be borne by the sheikh responsible, who would also be held liable for all further damage. After this remark there were no further claims to ownership, and the two sheikhs in question are going to great lengths to prove that their daraks are, in fact, considerably smaller than they at first imagined, so that it appears that the tract adjoining the road, unlike the rest of Sinai, is unclaimed by any tribe.

The strong point about recognising the darak system is that if a traveller engages the sheikh of the tribe and holds him responsible he is absolutely safe, as it is and always has been a point of honour with the Arab that no harm should come to his charge. The proof of this is the large number of historians and travellers who have journeyed through Sinai, Southern Palestine and Trans-Jordan, from the middle of the eighteenth century till the British occupation, in safety though probably not inexpensively.

On the other side of the picture is the fate of Professor Palmer, Lieutenant Charrington and Captain Gill, who set out from Suez in 1882 with two objects in view—*i.e.*, to pacify the Arabs, who were affected by the Arabi rebellion, and to buy camels for the British Army. Unfortunately, Palmer could not get hold of the sheikh he wanted, Sheikh Sulieman el Awamra of the Teaha, who was generally recognised as the headman of Sinai, as his son is to-day. His journey was urgent and he could



not wait, so he hired a scratch lot of Arabs sheikhed by the Lehewat Safieh tribe—who are and always have been a treacherous community—and set out eastwards. The party were carrying a chest of sovereigns, payment for the camels, and this aroused the cupidity of the Arabs. At a wild and desolate spot near Ain Sudr, about thirty miles east of Suez, they attacked the three Englishmen and threw them over a cliff, firing into their bodies till life was extinct. The party then buried the gold and scattered, but the crime caused almost as much horror among the reputable sheikhs of Sinai as it did among the British authorities, and every assistance was rendered to hand over those who had abused the laws of Arab hospitality. Several of the culprits suffered death, and the remainder were outcasts and exiles for the rest of their lives, whilst there is a black mark against the Lehewat Safieh that remains to this day.

There is one rather peculiar lawsuit that so far has never been settled, and in all probability never will be, as the episode happened in what in the old days was the No Man's Land of the Wadi Araba, which is outside the Sinai frontier, and the western half of which is administered by Palestine and the eastward by Trans-Jordan. Until the Wahabi advance in 1924 the southern portion belonged to the Hedjaz Government, so that four separate Governments were concerned. The story is that immediately after the war a Hebron merchant from Palestine, seeing that great profit would accrue by selling foodstuffs and clothing in the Akaba area, where the people had plenty of gold

(the result of British contribution to the Arab cause) but no food of any kind, equipped several mules with merchandise and sold them at a rate that only an Oriental would have had the hardihood to charge. On his return with one mule laden with gold he was raided by Arabs and the money was lost. The raid took place practically on the spot where the four countries concerned met, which made the settlement of responsibility difficult, more particularly because the Hedjaz Government never functioned. The robbed merchant was in doubt as to the nationality of his assailant, but, realising that Sinai had the Arab ordinance and would probably do more to help his case than anyone, accused the Sinai Lehewat tribe of being the culprits.

The case has been tried half a dozen times, but the merchant has so far never been able to recognise the robbers, though practically all the Lehewat have from time to time been brought before him. The truth of the story, which I have heard unofficially, is that the merchant was raided by the Howietat—the enemies and incidentally the neighbours of the Lehewat—but during the firing that took place and the tying up of the merchant, the important mule—*i.e.*, the one carrying the money-bags—bolted and disappeared in the hills to the west. That night the Lehewat found a straying mule weighed down with golden sovereigns and did what I imagine almost anyone else would do in the circumstances. They buried the gold, and realising that the mule was a dangerous piece of corroborative evidence, turned him loose and drove him back eastwards. The Hebron merchant

probably knows the truth, but obstinately tries to prove that the Lehewat were the raiders, and, without troubling about the question of the gold, the Lehewat can prove without the slightest difficulty that they did not raid the merchant.

Arab marriage customs are not quite so unromantic and prosaic as those that pertain in the Mohammedan world generally, where the father arranges the whole business with the prospective husband and the bride does not see her groom until the wedding day. As the 'giving' of a daughter in marriage is a purely commercial matter, and a good-looking girl can command a far higher price than a plain one, it usually occurs that the most charming young women are disposed of to old widowers who can afford to pay the price, and not to the personable young man the girl herself would select if she had any say in the matter.

In the Arab world a girl is allowed to meet the man her father has selected for her, and to talk to him alone if she desires it. This betrothal lasts for a year, at the end of which the marriage takes place, but if the girl is a virgin and taking her first step in married life, she has no right to object and is forced to take the man selected for her; if, however, she is a widow or a divorcée, she may exercise her own judgment. This is the Arab rule, but it would appear that young Arab women are more or less emancipated and do not by any means submit tamely to the dictates of their fathers. Cases frequently occur where girls run off with the young men they fancy a few days before the date of their wedding to some old man,



and this shows very marked character on their part, as if the family care to regard it in the worst light they are entitled to kill both parties to the elopement. Although a runaway match of this description is a direct insult to the family concerned, the average Arab has usually enough common-sense to see the matter in the young people's light, and the case is fixed up satisfactorily after a certain amount of bluster and threats of murder.

Quite an interesting romance occurred in Sinai a few years ago through a well-set-up young Arab policeman, named Nigm, constantly meeting a very pretty girl of the Lehewat tribe at the well near the police post at Themed. She was betrothed to her cousin, an unsavoury-looking rascal with cross eyes, but the young policeman, with his smart uniform and martial swagger, won her heart, and a few days before her wedding they eloped on Nigm's camel. This caused considerable stir in her own family, and incidentally among the authorities, as the policeman was absent without leave. The father, brother and cousin of the girl set off after the runaway pair, and, catching them the next morning, a sword-fight took place in which Nigm had his face laid open from brow to chin. Luckily a patrol turned up at the critical moment and saved his life.

The girl was taken back to her father's tent, whilst Nigm was admitted to hospital. The question of marrying her to her cousin as previously arranged was again discussed, but Nigm sent a message to say that if this was done he would most assuredly kill the husband, if he had to wait ten years to do



it, and this, coupled with the fact that the girl had been off with her lover for a whole night, caused the cousin to think twice about it. He pretended that a girl without honour would not suit him, though it was the thought of Nigm's revenge that worried him far more than the question of doubtful virginity. In the end an Orfi Court was arranged, and the matter was settled most satisfactorily by Nigm paying the ordinary price—*i.e.*, five camels, receiving the kassala and also the girl.

The most pleasing part about the romance is that it has turned out a most happy marriage, and Mrs Nigm as a policeman's wife is one of the best-dressed people in her area and quite a leader of local society. Nigm never fails to buy her an ornament when he goes out into the big cities like Suez and Ismailieh, and apparently values her all the more for having won her as a young woman should be won.

An Arab wedding is a very simple affair. The price having been arranged—*i.e.*, from one to five camels according to the charms of the lady, the husband turns up with his family and the camels. The camels having been passed as satisfactory—the most important part of the ceremony—the father hands the bridegroom the kassala (a green twig), which is worn in the head-dress for three days. The evening is then spent in festivities, which consist of dancing to an accompaniment of hand-claps, and at the close of the proceedings the happy couple pack up their belongings on their camel and trek off to their new camp.

## CHAPTER V.

## ADMINISTRATION OF SINAI.

"And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk."—EXODUS xviii. 20.

THE war in Sinai left the Arab population in a very aggressive and excited frame of mind—for three years they had experienced what the nomad Arab considers the ideal condition—*i.e.*, a state of *mafisch hakooma* (no Government) with plenty of easy money for information, reliable or otherwise, and unlimited arms and ammunition. This state of affairs, combined with the unrest caused by wild rumours of a huge Arab independent State which was to comprise the whole of the Near East—the result of rash war-time promises—was construed by the desert Beduin to mean that they were the paramount and ruling race, and that the towns and villages would be theirs to administer and incidentally to exploit. It never occurred to them that the Mohammedan fellah of the towns of Sinai, Palestine and Syria might hold entirely different views as to what independence meant.

It was by no means a simple task to persuade the Arabs to settle down again to the humdrum simple existence of the nomad. Values of everything had altered with the war, camels had increased in price from £9 to £40 and £50, corn was

almost unobtainable, sugar worth its weight in gold, and the only thing that had become cheap was human life, and the value of that was almost negligible. Every simple disagreement amongst themselves was the signal for a rifle-shot, and the younger bloods adopted the pastime of sniping at long range every patrol that passed. It was obvious that the first step to be taken must be the collection of arms, and very luckily the Turks had left behind them in El Arish a list of all the Arabs of Sinai who had been issued with rifles. The sheikhs responsible were sent for and ordered to bring in all the weapons that had been issued to their tribes. Needless to say, they did not carry this out with any degree of enthusiasm, and fines, sentences of imprisonment and seizure of animals had to be resorted to. Luckily the two most important and influential sheikhs of Sinai—*i.e.*, Salem el Awamra and Shahuda Daldul of the Tiaha and Terrabin tribes, had sufficient common-sense to realise that their people had got out of hand, and that discipline, or what passes for discipline in the Arab world, had to be maintained. These two men gave the Government every assistance, and the example set by the heads of the two biggest tribes gradually bore fruit, so that in two years Sinai had returned to its normal state.

The work of administering the Province was at first in the hands of a newly formed organisation called O.E.T.A. (Occupied Enemies' Territory Administration), but it was obvious that this was an anomaly in the case of Sinai, which was Egyptian territory. A new department, called the Frontier

Districts Administration, was then formed by the Egyptian Government for the special purpose of governing Sinai, the Western Desert Province and the Red Sea and Southern Deserts. All these nomad areas were in a disorganised state owing to the war, and it was obvious that some department with special powers was required to enable the whole administration of the deserts—viz., public security, public works, public health, taxation, anti-contraband, &c.—to come under one central authority with a view to co-ordinating work and exercising economy.

Previous to the war practically every department in Egypt had performed its share in the administration of Sinai. The Governor was supplied by the Egyptian Army, the police were a special force raised in the Province, the anti-contraband work was carried out by the Coastguards Service, the Interior interested themselves in taxation, and the Department of Public Health in medical officers, hospitals and pharmacies. This form of government, though suited to a densely populated country like Egypt, is cumbersome and expensive when applied to a vast wilderness occupied by nomad tribes. Moreover, Arab administration requires men with some experience of the Beduin and his ways, and however capable an official may be in his special department, he is apt to find himself very much at sea when he begins to deal with a race whose views on life are totally different from those held by the Egyptians, or any other nation in the world.

Colonel Parker, who had been Governor of Sinai from 1907 to 1912, was reappointed to the post



in this newly formed administration, and, owing to his very special knowledge of the Province and its inhabitants, the pacification and administration of Sinai were in a most satisfactory state two years after the Turkish evacuation of the country; but the unsettled condition pertaining in the northern part of the Hedjaz had its repercussion in Sinai, and raids from over the border were of frequent occurrence. Large parties of the Howietat tribe, armed with rifles, unlimited ammunition, and equipped with range-finders and field-glasses, crossed over into Sinai, driving off herds of camels and sheep and shooting everyone who showed resistance. To cope with these raiders a force of Sudanese Camel Corps was raised and stationed at Kuntilla and Themed. The men were chosen from the best fighting tribes of the Sudan and mounted on fast-trotting Sudanese camels. They were a highly disciplined force, and after two encounters with them the Howietat ceased to raid in large organised parties. Minor raids, however, continued till a frontier road was constructed in 1925, from El Arish to the Gulf of Akaba, and a Car Patrol was formed and equipped with machine-guns. A raiding party entering Sinai now finds all the passes guarded behind it six hours after the news is reported, whilst car and camel patrols equipped with machine-guns scour the desert in all directions. The pastime of raiding as a result has become so risky that the Howietat now avoid Sinai altogether, and there have been no raids for six years.

Under the present organisation the Governor is responsible for maintenance of public security and



Lt.-Col. A. C. PARKER, D.S.O.

Governor of Sinai till 1923.



administration of laws, taxation, public work of all kinds, anti-contraband, agriculture, &c., &c. Education in the Province is maintained by the Ministry of Education, who have established two boys' schools and a girls' school at El Arish, a school at Kantara, and two schools at Tor. The Arab seldom, if ever, avails himself of the opportunity of having his sons educated, but the settled inhabitants of the villages are most enthusiastic about education, and there is never any difficulty experienced in filling schools in Sinai, but rather in finding sufficient accommodation for the number of applicants.

It is a very moot point whether advanced education is of any real benefit to people of this type, for the simple reason that Sinai cannot possibly find clerical work for every would-be clerk that the schools turn out every year. Egypt has already an overwhelming mass of educated youths seeking clerical employment, and cannot absorb any more, and, moreover, the standard of education required in a Government office is far higher than the Sinai boy can obtain at El Arish. The result is that education is turning the son of the hard-working cultivator or camel-drover into a half-baked effendi (the nearest approach to a correct translation of effendi used in this sense is the English term 'black-coated fraternity'), insufficiently educated to become a clerk even if employment existed, and too proud to follow the calling of his father and work with his hands. The parents are chiefly to blame for this state of affairs, and appear to be imbued with the idea that an educated son wearing a tarbush and European



clothes instead of a gallabia (smock) and emma (turban) confers dignity on the family, though it is difficult to decide where the dignity comes in when the individual in question is a dissatisfied idler living on his father's charity. This state of affairs is not peculiar to Sinai, but pertains in Egypt also, and to a very marked extent in India. In fact, all over the world education brings in its train a distaste for manual labour, and as someone has to till the fields, mine the coal, and load and unload ships, what is the solution ?

So far as Sinai is concerned the solution is simple—if the inhabitants themselves would agree to it : it would lie in the abolition of the more advanced school and the substitution of a technical school where trades of all descriptions could be taught. Every boy whose parents desired it could attend the elementary school and learn the three R's and no more, as this is all the cultivator or camel contractor requires, and from these schools four boys of marked intelligence might be sent each year for higher education in the Nile Valley. The remainder would either enter the technical school to learn a trade or join their fathers in the fields. This scheme would ensure that every boy with ability above the average would have his chance of rising to higher things, whilst those of average brain-power would receive sufficient education to fit them to carry on the trade selected for them, but insufficient to fill them with ideas beyond their station in life.

Public security is maintained by a force of 145 mounted police and 104 dismounted. These men are locally enlisted from the Arabs, the Nekhlawia, and

inhabitants of El Arish and Tor, and provide their own camels and saddlery. The pay is not high—*i.e.*, £2, 10s. per month plus £1, 10s. forage for camel and 10s. for upkeep of saddlery, &c., but it is quite sufficient to attract the best type of men the Province produces. Like all locally enlisted forces, it is necessary to preserve as far as possible a balance with an equal number of each race in the force to encourage a healthy sense of rivalry, and, moreover, there is less risk of corruption when a patrol or post contains representatives of three different species. In addition a few Sudanese are also enlisted, as they are born soldiers and make first-class non-commissioned officers, and in no circumstances ever mix with the inhabitants.

The police of Sinai may not be the ideal police force in the world, but they have some very sterling qualities, one of which is that a party can be sent off on a 200-mile camel-patrol at five minutes' notice without anybody having to worry about their forage and ration supplies. They thoroughly understand that they must fend for themselves and their camels, and it is not necessary for A. and Q. branches to sit up all night arranging for supplies and water and writing operation orders—neither is there any need to instruct them as to the road, as every man knows the Peninsula and the site and condition of every well.

Owing to the fact that the men are constantly on patrol, it is impossible to pay very much attention to parades, and the extreme mobility of the force can only be maintained by completely ignoring what is known as 'regimental routine.' Neverthe-

less, the marked characteristic of the Sinai policeman is his ability to rise to an occasion. If there is a Guard of Honour or ceremonial parade required, a preliminary drill of an hour is all that is necessary to turn out a party who will handle their arms with the precision of Guardsmen, whilst their display at a kit-inspection would not disgrace a British Line Battalion.

They have a positive flair for doing the right thing should any Personage pass through Sinai, and there is no need to issue instructions to out-posts as to the compliments to be paid, as a guard of honour will always be found, and on special occasions the flag will be 'broken out' on the arrival of the individual. Mistakes sometimes occur as to the rank and standing of visitors, and it occasionally happens that a British subaltern on a shooting expedition is greeted by a general salute and hoisting of the flag—but in any case the mistakes are always on the right side.

On one occasion a Royal Air Force aeroplane wished to land at Kosseima post, but had no Vérey pistol cartridges and therefore could not discover the direction of the wind. They circled round for several minutes trying to find something that would help them, when suddenly a cloud of smoke went up from the corner of the landing ground. The non-commissioned officer in charge had guessed what was wrong and had caused a small fire of paraffin and rags to be lighted to enable the pilot to make his landing safely.

The Metropolitan Police of London are credited with being the most courteous and polite force in the



world, but the Sinai police must run them very close, as the kindness and helpfulness of the men in the outposts of the Peninsula to wayfarers is proverbial ; and I have a file of letters from grateful travellers testifying to their efficiency and courtesy.

The Sudanese Camel Corps and Car Patrols are a separate force and are in reality Gendarmerie. The unit with the police is the individual, but with the Camel Corps the unit is a section of forty men. They may be split up into half and quarter sections for patrol and post purposes, but for training and interior economy they exist as a section. The reason for this is that, however highly trained a policeman may be, he does not make a satisfactory soldier, as he has not been taught to perform his duties and manœuvre in a large body. If he were trained in this fashion he would lose his initiative and self-reliance and make an indifferent policeman. The necessity exists for a highly disciplined force to deal with big raids and with organised bands of smugglers, and the Camel Corps are enlisted for this purpose. In normal times they perform anti-contraband patrols and assist the police, but their training as a section is never lost sight of. The Camel Corps in Sinai consist of four sections with headquarters at El Arish, Kuntilla, Shatt and Tor, whilst the Car Patrol, with five six-wheeler Morris cars and three machine guns, is stationed at Kuntilla, where its presence on the frontier acts as a healthy deterrent to would-be raiders.

All cases of inter-tribal crime and tribal civil suits are dealt with by the Beduin or Orfi Courts, which are described in another chapter. The ordi-



nary criminal cases—*i.e.*, crimes committed by Arabs against the non-Arab population, against the laws of the country, or by Arishy or non-Arab races, are dealt with by specially selected and trained officers of the Frontier Administration who have passed an examination in the criminal code of Egypt and general procedure. All cases are reviewed by the Governor and afterwards by legal experts at the Headquarters in Cairo, and, though the lawyer fraternity may disagree with the wisdom of entrusting the trial of cases to anyone not a qualified graduate in law, the fact remains that there has never yet been a serious miscarriage of justice, and, what is more to the point, the guilty man seldom, if ever, escapes punishment through some legal quibble.

Civil suits are heard in the same manner, and the system here works quite as well as it does in criminal cases, as the officer charged with the hearing has the advantage of knowing the people, local conditions, and value and situation of the land at stake. A legal clerk, who is a graduate from the School of Law, is employed at Headquarters in El Arish, and is in a position to advise officers of any special legal point which may arise.

For administrative purposes Sinai is divided into four districts, Northern, Central, Southern and Kantara, each of which is governed by a Mamour or District Inspector who is responsible for public security and the general control of his area. He tries all simple cases of misdemeanour, but more serious matters are referred to the Governorate, and senior officers are delegated from time to time on tours of

inspection to conduct important civil or criminal suits.

The prison of the Province is at El Arish and has accommodation for sixty-five prisoners, who are employed on road-mending, brick-making, agricultural experiments, &c., and every man sentenced to more than fifteen days is sent to the central prison. If the sentence is less than fifteen days the prisoners are kept in the district lock-up and employed on local work, with the dual object of economising railway and travelling expenses and providing districts with free labour. No man who is serving a sentence of more than three years is kept in El Arish prison, as all terms of penal servitude have to be served in the State prisons of Egypt. The Arab will undergo his term of three years in El Arish cheerfully, as he is surrounded by his beloved desert and does not suffer from home-sickness. Hard labour with a shovel or mattock is a novel experience for a man who has studiously avoided all forms of work, but he appears to be happy and contented and incidentally puts on weight, as the prison fare is far in excess of his normal ration and contains, moreover, meat, which the Arab eats only at festivals and on special occasions. If, however, he is sent to a central prison in Egypt proper he languishes, and in most cases dies after two years' imprisonment. The only reason for this is that he loses the desire to live, and, with the fatalism peculiar to Oriental races, death follows very quickly. The prison fare in Egypt and the scale of work are precisely the same as in El Arish, but the prisons are situated in the midst of the rich cultivation of the Nile Valley—and this,

to the Arab accustomed to wide open spaces, is purgatory. This peculiarity of the Arab has to be borne in mind when considering the sentence, as a term of three years means, with the usual remission for good conduct, that the prisoner will return to his family after two years and three months; but if the sentence is four years it is to all intents and purposes a death sentence.

No stigma attaches to an Arab for having served a term; in fact, it is somehow regarded as a social uplift. When inspecting a squad of applicants for vacancies in the police I have frequently seen a face beaming with a smile of recognition, and on asking the man where we have met before, he has replied proudly that he served two years for smuggling, and during that time became a quite efficient blacksmith or gardener, which he considers a distinct recommendation for service in the police force. Certainly no feelings of resentment are harboured, and one is always certain of a very hearty welcome when trekking in the desert if one passes by the tent of an ex-convict. He considers that his term, which has taught him some useful work, has in some mysterious fashion put him on a higher plane than the rest of his tribe; and he feels that as one workman to another he may meet one on an equal footing.

In England a term of imprisonment carries with it a stigma for life, and it is difficult for a man who has served a sentence to get back to the position he held previously. This has its good and bad sides, as there is no doubt the disgrace of imprisonment is a far greater deterrent to crime than the sentence itself; but, on the other hand, the loss of self-esteem and



the feeling of being a pariah and social outcast has the effect of breaking a man's spirit for all time and turning him into an habitual criminal. There is nothing like this in the Arab world, and, though no ex-prisoner may serve in the police or in regular Government employment, some of the most reliable secret service agents in Sinai are men who have served terms for various offences, whilst the foremen of labour gangs are nearly always chosen from those who have learned their trade while undergoing a sentence. This applies to men who have committed an offence against the anti-contraband laws or who have been convicted for assault, manslaughter, or camel theft. The real thief, who breaks into houses and steals or commits any mean theft, is usually utterly worthless and unreliable and is quite unworthy of consideration or trust. As an instance of this I may quote the old gardener who is in charge of the agricultural experiments in El Arish, who complained to me of the type of prisoners sent to work in the garden. He said: "I have had some very bad prisoners in the garden lately and I can't trust them, as they are thieves. If I must have thieves, let me have camel thieves, as a camel thief will steal only camels—it is against his izzet (honour) to steal anything else. But what I prefer is murderers. I can always trust a murderer."

The same old gardener has a marked sense of humour and can be relied upon to rise to an occasion. There are always a certain number of prisoners working in the garden, and frequently one of them will seize the opportunity when the escort is not near to run up to me and say that he has been unjustly



treated and is not guilty. This does not mean that he has really been falsely convicted, but that he hopes by getting a word in privately to have his sentence reduced. I always call up the gardener, and on these occasions the following conversation takes place:—

“ How long have you worked in this garden ? ”

“ Nine years, effendim.”

“ How many prisoners have worked here with you in that time ? ”

“ Upwards of five hundred.”

“ Have you ever had a guilty man among those ? ”

“ Never, effendim ; not one has been guilty. If a guilty man came into this garden I would have him removed.”

The prisoner with a sickly smile then realises that his plaint has fallen on exceedingly barren ground, and the interview ends.

Once, when partridge shooting, I was joined by an Arab who made himself most useful in following up and retrieving wounded birds and detecting coveys on the move a quarter of a mile away. I then asked him if he knew of a good place for hares in the vicinity, and he replied that he could not say for certain, as he had not been in that part of the world for two and a half years. “ I’m just out of prison,” he added. “ I served a sentence of two and a half years and only came out this morning.” Not only did he bear me no grudge for representing the Government which had incarcerated him, but he was quite willing to spend three or four hours of his first day of freedom helping me before going on to join his family.

Public health and sanitation are maintained by a

special department that has provided a first-class hospital at El Arish, with doctors and pharmacies at Rafa, Kantara and Tor, whilst Tamurgies (dispensers) are maintained at the outposts of Kuntilla, Kosseima and Nekhl, who are charged with the health of the police in the posts and the Arab population generally. The Arabs have their own treatments for most diseases, and also make most noxious medicines from the various herbs found in the desert. Some of their mixtures brewed from plants have certain medicinal properties and have the desired effect, though the cure may be drastic; but concoctions made from foxes' hearts, leopards' liver and hyena fat have little to recommend them. For toothache they usually insert a seton in the cheek or neck, which in the absence of any antiseptic is apt to suppurate, and burning with hot charcoal is used for stomach pains, although the cause of these pains may be appendicitis, acute indigestion, or an internal growth. A verse of the Koran written on a scrap of paper and worn in the head-dress is supposed to have wonderful healing properties, and I once found my cow, who had had an attack of sand colic, wearing a verse of the Koran on her horns.

The Arab, however, really knows that his simple cures are of little value, and the hospital and pharmacies are well attended; but, though he is willing to undergo lengthy treatment in hospital, he most emphatically draws the line at operations, and far prefers death to the unpleasant experience of taking chloroform and submitting himself to the knife.

Once whilst on trek on the Akaba Gulf three very

bad cases of eye-trouble were brought to me. I have no medical knowledge whatsoever, but after examination it seemed to me that there was nothing radically wrong and that the patients were suffering from conjunctivitis in a most advanced form through dirt and neglect. I had some boracic powder and lint with me, and, getting some hot water, made the most intelligent of the assembled Arabs bathe the affected eyes, afterwards putting on bandages soaked in boracic solution. I returned that way seven days later and found my patients cured, and the Arab who had acted as my assistant, and who had taken full credit for the success of the treatment, suggested that I should supply him with some drugs so that he could do simple medical work. He seemed to think that, having bathed and bandaged eyes with considerable success, he had partially qualified as a doctor. He was given some quinine, No. 9 pills, aspirin and boracic, and told how to use them, and six months later travelled 150 miles to El Arish to get a fresh supply. Apparently he was doctoring all the Arabs along the Gulf with marked success and his fame had spread even into the Hedjaz, so that sick people were brought across the Akaba Gulf to be treated by him. He asked quite seriously that he might be provided with a stethoscope, as, he said, all the best doctors used them, and it was really impossible to tell definitely what a man was suffering from unless he could listen to his inside. He is still functioning as a doctor on the shores of the Gulf, but his failure to cure an advanced tuberculosis case with No. 9 pills has apparently tarnished his reputation to a certain extent.



The inspection of the Province is carried out by means of cars where car roads exist, and in other parts by camel. Practically the whole of Central Sinai, which consists of a vast gravel plateau, is negotiable by wheeled traffic, but the sandy belt along the Mediterranean Coast and along the Suez Canal is for the most part quite impossible. The main roads in Sinai—and the word road must be taken to mean a cleared track roughly levelled off or built up with stone and clay in sandy places—are from Shatt opposite Suez to Hassana and thence to Kosseima and the frontier; from El Arish to Kosseima and thence to Kuntilla and Ras el Negb; from Kuntilla to Themed, Nekhl, and then to a junction at Wadi el Haj, where it links up with the Shatt-Hassana road; and from Shatt southwards on to Tor, with a branch track up the Wadi Sidri to the Monastery of St. Catherine.

The road from Shatt to the frontier near Kosseima is the most important, as it is the only link between Africa and Asia and Europe, and sooner or later the vital necessity of this link will become obvious and steps will be taken to make it into a proper highway. At the present time only £3000 has been spent on this route, most of which has been swallowed up by the construction of a stone road across the difficult piece of sand country between Shatt and the Mitla Pass. The Mitla Pass, which is a rocky line of broken hills covered with sand dunes, presented considerable difficulty, but a straight stone road with cuttings and embankments has been carried right through it, and the gradient is easy for all makes of cars.

The road from Shatt is liable to get sanded up in



parts during the spring sand-storms, but otherwise the route is easy for all touring cars, and the journey from Cairo to Jerusalem takes from fourteen to fifteen hours only. The road from Kosseima along the frontier to Kuntilla and the Ras el Negb is also a first-class track, but is liable to wash-out during rains. These wash-outs are of a temporary nature, and ten minutes' work with shovels is all that is needed to make a crossing. At the same time it is advisable not to get caught in the desert during the heavy rains that occur from December to March, as the clayey gravel of Central Sinai becomes sodden and extremely heavy, so that travelling is impossible.

The track from Shatt to Abu Zeneima runs the whole way along the side of a watershed, and the surface of the road is, as a result, extremely rough. The branch track up the Wadis Sidri and Feiran to the monastery is merely a cleared path up the bed of a water-course which is scoured by floods three or four times a year. Sometimes a flood is a moderate one, and, without disturbing the stones, leaves a clay deposit which makes car travel easy; but a severe flood washes boulders of huge size down the water-course, and the track is then impossible for anything except six-wheelers with skilled desert drivers. A considerable amount of money has been expended on the road with a view to making access to the monastery easy, but as the only possible route is up the bed of a mountain water-course the result of the sums expended is not apparent for very long. At the present time the track is practically impossible, and the most comfortable route is

by camel from Tor up the Wadi Hebran, a journey that takes two and a half days.

The whole of Southern Sinai is a broken and confused mass of granite mountains and appears to be absolutely impossible for car traffic. As a matter of actual fact, the wadis or dry water-courses that intersect the mountain range are for the most part moderately smooth and consist of granite shingle bound together with a clay deposit left by floods. It has been found that many of them can be negotiated by cars, though it is usually a difficult matter when one reaches the head waters to pass over the watershed into the next wadi. Some of the passes are almost impossible for camels, but others open out on to small plateaux, so that practically all Southern Sinai has been traversed by car ; but such exploring is not to be lightly undertaken with ordinary touring models.

The Province car-drivers are a most efficient and resourceful body of men, and their chief value lies in the fact that they do not know what a Trade Union is, nor are they versed in garage traditions with regard to length of time to be taken over jobs, with the result that they cheerfully carry out in six or seven hours a repair for which the unwritten law of civilised garages lays down a week. One of the quickest things I have seen was the repair of a broken crankshaft in an old model Ford that occurred half-way between Shatt and Abu Zeneima. I naturally concluded that the car was completely out of action, as we had no spare crankshaft ; but the driver said he did not share my pessimism. He said that he would hook the portable telephone on to

the telegraph wires which adjoin the track and send a message to the car-driver at Shatt to get the crankshaft out of an old engine that was in store there and bring it down. The message reached the Shatt driver at 2 P.M.—in two hours he had the crankshaft out of the engine, and in another two hours had travelled forty miles south and reached the scene of the mishap. By this time the driver of the damaged car had got the broken crankshaft out, but the sun had set and no further work was possible. At the first crack of dawn the two men started operations and by mid-day the car was on the road. Of course no garage proprietor will believe this, and, with the old tradition that a crankshaft job takes a fortnight, one cannot ask him to do so. But the old model Ford was a singularly easy car to repair when the driver understood it, and, normally speaking, two tyre levers, a piece of telephone wire and a hairpin or so were all the spare parts required.

When all is said and done a trek by camel, if time is of no particular object, is by far the most comfortable and satisfactory. Camels, like horses, vary considerably in their gait, and unless one chooses one's mount carefully one may get an animal whose every step is agony; but if the camel is of the right *hageen* variety and moves along with an easy shambling trot, and if the saddle has been packed properly, the seat is as comfortable as an arm-chair. With cars there is always so much work to be done every evening in repairing punctures, replacing springs, covers, &c., that all the staff seem to be fully occupied and unable to make the camp com-



fortable for the night. Moreover, one is often delayed by car trouble, so that the arrival at the camping site does not leave sufficient time to get things ship-shape before dark. With a camel patrol the evening shid (march) ends punctually an hour before sunset, and as the column moves slowly one is able to select a comfortable and suitable spot, sheltered from the wind, convenient for firewood, and with the tents erected so that the early morning sun shines on the breakfast table.

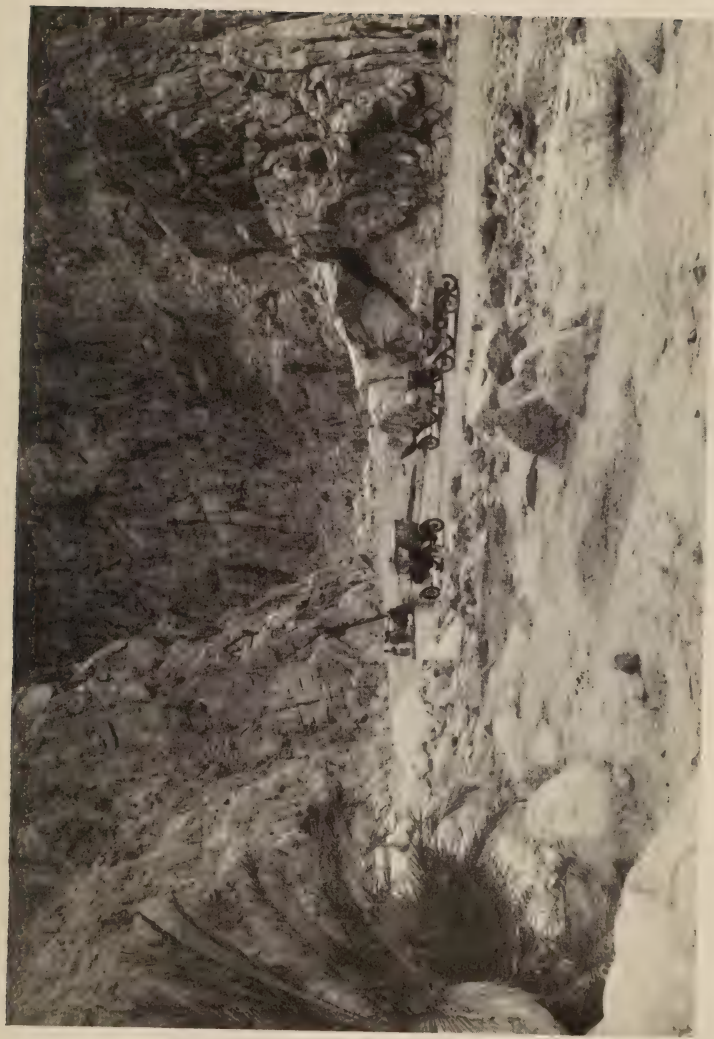
When the whistle goes for the halt every man knows his job, and—as the Camel Corps was originally trained by an ex-Scots Guard N.C.O.—moves to it at the double. Six men erect the tent and put up the bed and table, two unload the kitchen boxes and light the kitchen fire, two others fetch water, whilst the remainder off-saddle and turn the camels loose to graze. In ten minutes tea is ready and one is seated before a blazing scrub fire; and when one is five thousand feet above sea level in winter-time, a camp fire, and a big one, is more than a luxury—it is a veritable necessity. Most of the wadis in Southern Sinai contain tarfa (tamarisk) bushes, which provide excellent firewood in such quantities that one can have a bonfire four feet high which will keep a tent warm and cosy when the water is freezing in the water-bottles outside.

It is a point of honour on trek in Southern Sinai to avoid the use of tinned food as much as possible, and selected Arab police always accompany a patrol, who are provided with money and charged with the maintenance of fresh supplies. At the end of the



day's march these police come in, one carrying a bottle of ewe's milk, which incidentally is far preferable to that of goat's; another has gone down to the sea-shore and brought back half a dozen crayfish and some fresh mullet; whilst a third has probably bought a young lamb for five shillings, which he has carried in on his saddle. A gun slung in a leather case on the back of the saddle will usually result in a brace of partridges or sand-grouse every day, so that, though the tin-opener is carried on patrol, it plays a very unimportant part and might easily be left behind.

A Province like Sinai can only be administered by maintaining a first-hand knowledge of the country and the people. It is quite impossible from one's office desk at headquarters to keep in touch with all that is happening, and it is absolutely essential that one is frequently out seeing things for oneself and meeting the Arab. Travellers in Sinai are apt to jump to the conclusion that it is devoid of population, as when passing through by car they do not see tents or any sign of occupation. This is due to the fact that the Arab is of a naturally retiring disposition and he does not like to see too many signs of *hakooma* (government). For this reason he never pitches his tent on a spot where it can be seen from a car road, but carefully places it round a corner in a wadi or behind a hill. One may camp in what is apparently the most deserted spot in Sinai, but in ten minutes an Arab will appear from nowhere in particular, and in two hours one is surrounded by quite a crowd. If the crowd should assume con-



Cars in the Wadi Nasb, Southern Sinai.



siderable proportions and become a nuisance, there is no necessity to order them away—all one has to do is to produce a shovel and suggest a job of work in improving the road, and in a moment the desert will be empty again.



## CHAPTER VI.

## HISTORY.—I.

“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday.”—PSALMS xc. 4.

IT is not without hesitation that I start this chapter, as probably no two historians have ever agreed entirely on the much-debated question of the history of Sinai and the periods to which the various tombs, ruins and writings belong. For many years it was believed that the Peninsula had a very definite prehistoric past, and Palmer, in his book ‘The Desert of the Exodus,’ mentions the large number of flint instruments found on all hillsides, and also stone circles and mounds that obviously date back to palæolithic days. Flint arrowheads, scraping-knives, &c., lie thick all over the plateau of Central Sinai, so thick, in fact, that one may gather a sackful in a day’s march; and it was this extraordinary profusion that convinced the Palestine Exploration Party of 1913-14 that ninety-nine out of a hundred were naturally chipped by the action of the weather and that the remaining one per cent were of present-day origin, as the Arab, if he has forgotten his knife, will always knap a flint to skin and cut up an animal, and also shapes and maintains a supply with which to light his pipe.

The stone circles and mounds were also dismissed by the same authorities as being of no particular

antiquity, so that Sinai's claim to a prehistoric past cannot be substantiated. My authority for this statement is the Palestine Exploration Fund, and the party who carried out the survey in 1913-14 consisted of Messrs Woolley and Lawrence—*i.e.*, Colonel T. E. Lawrence of Hedjaz fame, who made his first acquaintance with the scenes of his later exploits during this expedition.

From evidence available—*viz.*, the temples and barracks of Serabit el Khadim and the turquoise and copper mines of Maghara, the ancient Egyptians were interested considerably in Southern Sinai even in predynastic days, but apparently never used Northern and Central Sinai except as a highway connecting the Nile Valley with Palestine and Syria, as there are no traces of any kind of their permanent occupation of this part of the Peninsula.

At Maghara, near Abu Zeneima, at Gebel Habashi, and in various other places in Southern Sinai are old mines worked by the Egyptians, and the inscriptions carved in the rocks at Maghara definitely date the occupation of this area to the First Dynasty—*i.e.*, 5500 B.C., whilst the discovery of baboon figures denoting the moon cult, which were discovered at Serabit el Khadim, would tend to prove that the mines might possibly date back even to predynastic days. One of the monuments found at Maghara is a rock tablet representing Khufu, who built the Pyramids, smiting the Anu—*i.e.*, the local Beduin of that day, whilst other inscriptions prove that the area was exploited for its precious stones and copper until the Hyksos invasion of Egypt in 2500 B.C.

During the Hyksos occupation of the Nile Valley there is no trace of any Egyptian activities in Sinai, and it was not till the Eighteenth Dynasty that they returned to the works at Serabit and Maghara.

It was during this period that the temple and barracks were built—*i.e.*, 1580 B.C., as previous to that time religious rites had been carried out in the caves hewn in the hillside and on an open space where burnt-offerings were sacrificed. This is proved by a solid mass of wood ashes some eighteen inches thick that covers the small plateau in front of the caves, and suggests that Serabit was a holy place of some importance. Apparently the Egyptians did not exploit the mines without opposition from the existing inhabitants of Sinai, and until the Twelfth Dynasty appear to have obtained their mining rights from the Mentu, who presumably were the local Beduin of that time. In the reign of Senusert I. they seem to have driven off the Mentu and to have established themselves as owners of the area.

It is interesting to note that the ancient Egyptians showed their greatest activity in Sinai during the Eighteenth Dynasty, as the extensive buildings at Serabit are attributed to that period. The ruins consist of a temple, sanctuary, pillared courtyard and a row of chambers that suggests barrack-rooms. They might, of course, have been used to accommodate the temple staff or religious pilgrims, but, considering that Sinai in those days was not administered as a whole by the Egyptians, it is much more likely that this row of rooms was provided for troops to guard the mines from the Beduin.



It is interesting to bear this fact in mind when considering the disputed site of the Mountain of the Law during the Israelite wanderings. Gebel Mousa, the accepted site, is only fifty miles or so from the barracks at Serabit el Khadim, and only ten to fifteen miles from the various copper mines worked by the Egyptians. The date of the Exodus is not known with any degree of exactitude, but is generally supposed to have taken place between 1450 B.C. and 1350 B.C., or during a period when the Egyptians were exploiting fully Southern Sinai and maintaining a garrison there. It is difficult, therefore, to believe that Moses, having had one narrow escape from the Egyptian Army, would deliberately lead his people into the one area in Sinai where his enemies maintained a military force, and the more difficult to believe that the Israelites were left unmolested in their encampment under the Mountain of the Law for over a year.

With the exception of the monuments at Serabit el Khadim, there is no trace whatsoever of ancient Egyptian civilisation in Sinai, and there is no reason to believe that they took any interest in it except as the desert that protected them to a certain extent from eastern invasions, and which they had to cross themselves if they wished to attack their neighbours in Palestine and Syria. The first invasion of any importance that is recorded is that made at the end of the Fourteenth Dynasty—*i.e.*, about 2500 B.C., when the Hyksos, a mysterious race from the East, invaded Egypt. It is believed that the Hyksos were a Semitic people, possibly Arabs, and that they were uncivilised is proved by the fact



that they left little or no trace of their occupation of the Nile Valley. It was during the Hyksos dynasties that horses were introduced to Egypt, which lends colour to the belief that they were of Arab origin and that their invasion of the country was made through Sinai.

For the next 2500 years invading and retiring armies marched across the Peninsula—Syrians, Assyrians, Hittites, Babylonians, Jews, Persians and Greeks. The fortunes of Egypt fluctuated in those days as they have done ever since—at times she appears to have been the paramount power in the Near East, and to have maintained as colonies Palestine and Syria. A hundred years or so later through internal troubles she became weak, losing all her colonies and dependencies and being herself invaded by her erstwhile subject races. Then another period of prosperity and strength would occur, followed by fresh conquests east of Sinai, till the Persian invasion of 340 B.C. finally broke the power of Egypt and the country became a Persian colony, and remained so up to the time when Alexander the Great drove Darius III. out of the country and established the Ptolemaic Dynasties.

At the present time the conveyance of an army across Sinai would be an undertaking of considerable magnitude if the railway did not exist, but in the past the crossing of the wilderness seems to have presented no great difficulty, as armies were constantly on the move and appear to have crossed the Peninsula with no particular hardship or loss of men through thirst or hunger. The explanation of this is that in all probability the belt of sand-

dune country that extends from Kantara to Sheikh Zowaid is of more or less recent origin, and that previously the whole of the coast-line was a low-lying clay or gravel plain with water at the depth of six feet or so. It is possible also that to facilitate movements of troops a stone road was constructed, and between Mazar and Masaid a small stretch of made highway is exposed between the sand dunes that may date back to any period. It is difficult to date the inroad of sand that now stretches from the Mediterranean coast some twenty-five to thirty miles inland, but there is one stretch of dunes that has recently invaded the Hassana area and which has advanced a mile and a half in ten years, covering a wide gravel expanse that a decade ago was entirely free from sand. If the dunes on the sea-shore have advanced at the same rate, one may assume that the sandy belt is not more than five hundred years old, which would explain the ease with which armies crossed and recrossed what is now a veritable barrier.

In the reign of Ptolemy XII., 51-47 B.C., the Romans, by intriguing with Cleopatra and rendering active assistance in putting down rebellions in Egypt, gained a footing in that country which led to its becoming a Roman dependency in the year 30 B.C. The situation in those days was very similar to what occurred in 1882 when internal dissensions caused Great Britain to occupy Egypt temporarily, with the result that, having shouldered the burden, she has so far been unable to shift the responsibility undertaken, unless she leaves Egypt defenceless against foreign aggression. Egypt, by reason of

her geographical position, as the link between Asia and Africa, is and always will be the key to the East, and as such will continue to be a bone of contention between powers who maintain dependencies in Asia and Africa.

Sinai, however, does not figure to any great extent in the various civil wars that led to the Roman occupation, except that Pompey the Great, fleeing from Julius Caesar, landed at Galss, then known as Mount Casius, and was there assassinated by Achillas at the instigation of Ptolemy XII., who had offered him sanctuary.

In the days of the Roman occupation the Pelusiatic branch of the Nile, now dried up, flowed through what is now Kantara and entered the sea between Mohammediyah and Tel el Farama. At Tel el Farama there are the extensive ruins of Pelusium, which was a thriving city at that time, whilst farther east lies Mohammediyah, now nothing but a mark on the map; but the long line of massive stone quays half covered by sand dunes proves that it was a port of considerable importance. The Romans apparently maintained military posts of great size along the Sinai coast at a distance of roughly fourteen miles between stations, which was the recognised day's march of a legion. Some of the smaller forts have disappeared utterly, but those that remain are Pelusium (Tel el Farama); Ostracine (Filusiat, from the Arabic word 'money,' so called from the amount of Roman coins found in the sand); Rhinocolorum (El Arish), and Raphia (Rafa.) The Roman road from Palestine apparently forked at Ostracine, one leading south of the Bardawil Lake *via* Mazar, Bir



el Abd to Romani, whilst the other followed the sea coast to Galss or Mount Casius.

At Pelusium and Ostracine there are remains of stone-built towns with mosaics and carvings, but at Rafa nothing is left with the exception of a marble column now used as a boundary post. El Arish apparently became a thriving city during the latter part of the Roman occupation and had a cathedral, monastery and convent belonging to the Christian Byzantine period. Small marble columns have, however, been found with Greek inscriptions on them, proving that, though originally part of a building, they had been used later as Greek tombstones, which points to the fact that though no traces now remain there was an early Roman temple there, destroyed either by an earthquake or Christian iconoclasts.

Judging by the mass of Byzantine pottery lying on the surface of the soil round El Arish, Rhinocolorum must have been a city of considerable size and covered an area of eight square miles. The invading sand, however, has piled up on the ruins, but occasionally the walls of old buildings are disclosed during cultivation, and the fact that there is no stone available in the El Arish area has resulted in every ruin being removed bodily for building purposes and the construction of wells.

The fort at El Arish, which dates back to the fifteenth century, and standing as it does on commanding ground, was no doubt the site of castles and strong points erected before that date. During the Great War, when El Arish was occupied by the Turks, it came in for unwelcome attentions from the



British Fleet, and was so heavily shelled that it was reduced to a heap of stones. When stone is required for Government buildings the ruins of the fort supply the want, and a year or so ago when labourers were digging in the débris they came across an underground passage, by the usual method of a workman falling through into a hole. It led apparently from the base of one of the turrets at an angle of 45 degrees into a subterranean vault, and as it was quite possible that it dated back to Roman or even earlier times it was an interesting discovery which might repay further exploration. I therefore gave instructions for the workmen to dig away the rubble that filled the passage and to report to me immediately they came across anything of interest. In three days' time the foreman of the gang came to my office and reported that they had cleared the passage and had found their way into a big room where there was ancient pottery of great value. With visions of a discovery of great historical interest I hurried up to the fort, went down the subterranean passage and found myself in a perfectly fitted modern lavatory, with fine porcelain work by Jennings & Co. of London. It appeared that in pre-war days the fort had been used as a Government office, and early in 1914 the modern lavatory had been installed in the basement of the building, which, when all is said and done, was a very suitable place for it.

Prior to and coinciding with the occupation of Egypt by the Romans was the sudden rise to power of the Nabbateans, a Semitic race of whom little is known beyond the fact that they are responsible for

the wonderful buildings carved out of the solid rock at Petra on the east side of the Wadi Araba. They first came into prominence about 500 B.C., and from that time till the conquest of Petra in 105 A.D. by Trajan appear to have been a virile and enterprising race who controlled the whole of the caravan trade between India and Arabia and Egypt. Their headquarters were at Petra, but at the height of their power they maintained posts as far north as Damascus, and apparently levied toll on every caravan coming into Egypt from India and the Far East. They held outposts in Sinai, and many of the rough inscriptions on the rocks in Southern Sinai, known as the Sinaitic writings, which for many years puzzled historians, are now regarded as being the work of Nabatean shepherds in charge of grazing camels.

In the Wadi Mukatteb (Valley of Writings), Wadi Nasb, and in fact in most of the wadis of Southern Sinai, are to be found fallen blocks of granite covered with rough inscriptions and drawings. The drawings for the most part are of horses, camels, gazelles, but ibex with the most astonishing heads predominate. The inscriptions are in many languages—*i.e.*, Aramaic, Kufic and Greek; and when translated are not of vast interest, being merely the name of the carver and a pious wish that he should not be forgotten, such as “Remember Zailu, son of Waila,” and “Be mindful of Chalios, son of Zaidu”; but one disgruntled traveller has written “An evil race. I, Lupus, a soldier, wrote this with my own hand.” He had probably had the wrong end of a bargain with a local Arab and wished the world to know what he thought of it. In any case the casual way-

side engravers of the late B.C.'s and early A.D.'s have left something behind them that can be translated and understood, even if the remarks are of no great interest. One can only imagine the difficulties and perplexities of historians two thousand years hence, who, after weeks of labour, decipher a present-day English inscription such as, "Coronach, a snip for the Derby," or "Put your shirt on Dark Warrior for the Lincoln," not to mention merry little jingles starting with, "There was a young man of Natal."

Beyond the writings in the wadis of Southern Sinai there is no trace of Nabbatean occupation unless the dam and reservoir at Ain Gedeirat can be attributed to them, and this view is not supported by those in a position to know.

The Byzantine period of the Roman occupation was apparently a thriving one for North-East Sinai and South-West Palestine, as not only El Arish, but Kosseima and Gedeirat, together with Auja, Birein, Esbeita, and Asluj in Palestine, show signs of extensive occupation. One can only surmise that such was the general prosperity of the Near East that the surplus population went far afield into the desert, and by dint of hard labour and conservation of every available water-supply managed to extract a living and build towns in areas that to-day will barely support a Beduin family. The inhabitants in those days appear to have been Greeks under the Byzantine Empire, and the Arabs of to-day attribute all traces of civilisation to people from Kopros (Cyprus), whom they state occupied all Northern Sinai up to the time of the Mohammedan invasion.

Rhinocolorum, Ostracine and Pelusium were





The old Reservoir at Wadi Gedeirat.

Wadi Gedeirat is most probably the Kadesh Barnea of the Bible.



Nabbatean writings on a rock in Wadi Feiran, including rough drawings of Camels, an Ibex and a Hyæna.





cathedral cities, as were Paran (Wadi Feiran) and Mount Sinai in Southern Sinai, and there are records of the respective Bishops being in conference in 359 A.D. to decide what action should be taken against certain divines who were casting doubts on the Immaculate Conception. The dawn of Christianity brought Sinai, as the site of the Law-giving, into prominence, and in the second century pilgrims and hermits from all parts of the Near East began to concentrate in the Peninsula. To the religious fanatic the huge granite mountains and the extraordinary silence that reigns in this area, combined with the incense-like smell of the shrubs, create an awe-inspiring atmosphere of sanctity and holiness, and it can be readily understood that it afforded a welcome retreat from the outer world to the devout and pious. At this time also the barbarity of the Romans towards Christians drove the professors of the new faith from the towns into the wilderness, and the fact that Southern Sinai was beyond the sphere of Roman occupation made it doubly attractive to those desirous of leading a hermit's existence. As a result of the influx of pilgrims, Wadi Feiran, where a spring of water flows through the valley for three miles, became ultimately a Cathedral City, whilst the Convent of St. Catherine at the foot of Gebel Mousa was the seat of an Archbishopric.

The Wadi Gedeirat near Kosseima, which is mentioned in another chapter, now supports merely a small number of Arabs and Arishia who cultivate and irrigate gardens from the spring that flows down the valley, but was in Byzantine times a town of some importance. The spring was dammed at its

source and the water carried in stone irrigation channels along the hillsides into a huge reservoir, which conserved supplies for the plain below. The remains of a Byzantine town are scattered on the northern hillside, whilst in the centre of the valley stands the ruins of a fort the stones of which have so completely disintegrated that it is impossible to date the building. It is, however, definitely not Roman, and may possibly have been originally an Egyptian, Nabbatean, or even Hebrew outpost.

Along both hillsides runs a stone wall about four or five feet high, which puzzled the Palestine Exploration party who examined the wadi in 1913. I think, however, the reason of the walls is obvious, as they extend along both hillsides from the reservoir to the dam at the narrow end of the valley, and here the two walls lead down the hillside and almost meet. My contention is that the wadi itself and both hillsides were terraced and planted with vines and olives, and the wall constructed to keep grazing goats and camels from the gardens. It certainly could have served no useful purpose as a form of defence against Beduin tribes, but would have provided a most effective barrier against grazing animals, so much so that the Government of to-day are seriously considering its repair.

The Mohammedan invasion in the seventh century swept away the Byzantine civilisation of this area as a locust swarm devastates a cornfield. Apparently the fortress towns of Ostracine, Casium and Rhinocolorum fell without any fighting, but Pelusium was defended by Roman troops and surrendered only after a lengthy siege. It is difficult

to understand how a fortified town manned by disciplined troops and equipped with war-engines failed to withstand the onslaught of desert warriors armed with lances and bows. One can only conclude that the majority of the Roman forces were mercenaries with no heart in the cause and inspired merely with a desire to get away from service in a land of exile. The Roman Empire in those days was disintegrating fast, and the picked legions were being withdrawn from the colonies and dependencies to assist in the defence of the Capital, with the result that the foreign corps left in the outposts put up a very poor resistance against the hordes of invaders who were advancing from all points of the compass.

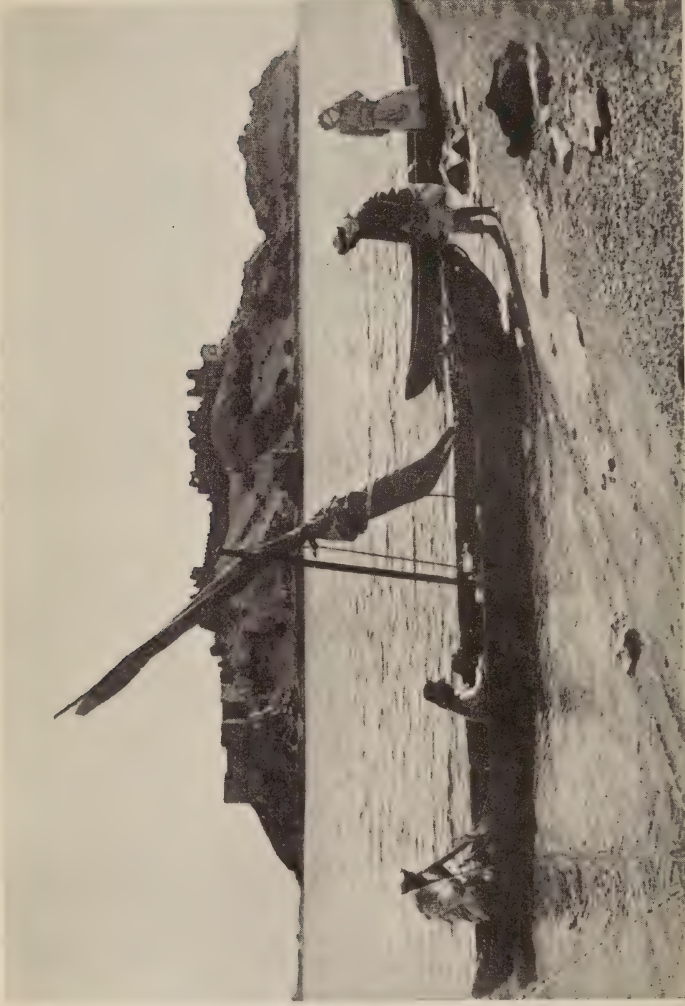
The population of these desert cities, cut off from civilisation, had no alternative but to embrace the Mohammedan faith, and were in course of time absorbed by the Arab invaders and existing Arab tribes, for there is every reason to suppose that the desert part of Sinai has always been inhabited by much the same type of Arab as he who dwells there now. The Ancient Egyptians called them the Mentus, the Christian hermits alluded to them as Ishmaelites, and the Crusaders called them Saracens ; but whatever their name it is more than probable that they were very much the same race of nomad as one sees to-day. Changes have taken place—tribes have trickled in from the Hedjaz and Trans-Jordan and pushed back the original occupiers of the land, but rigours of climate, sparseness of vegetation and lack of water are the determining factors ; the inhabitants of Sinai must of necessity be nomads,



and, whatever the conditions in the outside world, their mode of life remains the same.

Many of the Greeks of the Byzantine period no doubt settled in El Arish, Khan Yunis and Gaza in Palestine, as blue eyes and red and fair hair predominate in these villages. They have inter-married with Arabs, and the population has been added to by deserters from various armies and pilgrims from Mecca, who have seen an opening for their particular trade and have settled down, and the result is the extraordinary mixed race of no particular origin to be found along the Sinai and Palestine coasts.





Faroon Island, in the Gulf of Akaba.

The Castle, called Graye by the Crusaders, was built by Renaud de Chatillon during the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER VII.

## HISTORY.—II.

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket."—ISAIAH xl. 15.

THE history of Sinai during the First Crusade and the Kingdom of Jerusalem is unfortunately rather obscure, as historians of that period were mostly Arab writers whose sense of locality and distance was by no means reliable, whilst the few Crusaders who wrote accounts of their service in the east were more interested in the events which happened in the rich holdings in Palestine proper and Syria, and did not concern themselves with the outposts maintained in the desert. If the Crusaders had been inspired with the same desire to rush into print that was shown during the late war, there would no doubt be ample material of great interest dealing with outposts and patrols in Sinai.

The Knights of the First Crusade were apparently inspired with two objects in view: first, to free Jerusalem from Mohammedan rule; and secondly, to carve out a future for themselves in a new land. The first objective was paramount at the beginning of the campaign, but immediately this had been



achieved the knights, who were mostly younger sons with no holdings in France, Germany, or England, proceeded to build castles and establish, by means of the existing population in Palestine and Syria, the same feudal system with serfdom pertaining at that time in Europe. Apparently after the conclusion of the hostilities that led to the capture of Jerusalem, the Crusaders settled down more or less peaceably with their Mohammedan neighbours, and a peculiarity of the situation was the fact that several towns—*i.e.*, Aleppo, Damascus, Emesa, &c., in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, were allowed to remain in Mohammedan hands, although there is little doubt that the Franks could have captured these cities had they so desired.

The Knights of the First Crusade intermarried with the women of Palestine and Syria, and in two generations had become so orientalised that had there been no fresh influx of blood from Europe the probability is that in course of time they would have become absorbed by the existing inhabitants and ceased to exist as a distinct race. Fresh drafts of knights and men, however, arrived from Europe all burning with zeal to strike a blow for Christianity and incidentally also to found manors for themselves, and these reinforcements looked down upon the descendants of the First Crusade, calling them Pulani—*i.e.*, Levantines. By their raids on the flocks of the Mohammedan population, and their brutality to the people, they destroyed the harmony that had existed between the early settlers and incurred the hatred of all Moslems. It is a regrettable factor also that by order of the ecclesiastics who accom-

panied the Crusaders no treaties or contracts made with Mohammedans need be regarded as binding, with the result that truces were broken by the Christian rulers in a most barefaced manner, and the deep-seated resentment incurred finally led to the attacks by Zengy, followed by the Saladin campaign, at the end of which the Crusader Kingdom lost the whole of Palestine with the exception of the ports of Jaffa and Acre.

Palestine and Syria, during the Frankish Kingdom, were divided as follows: the county of Edessa, which included the head waters of the Euphrates and extended as far west as Aleppo; the principality of Antioch, a strip of country along the coast-line from the River Pyramus to Tripoli; and the county of Tripoli, another coastal province extending from Tripoli to Beyrout. These counties and principalities were subsidiary states of the King of Jerusalem, Baldwin I., whose kingdom stretched from Beyrout in the north to Darum in Sinai, thence to the Gulf of Akaba, whilst in the east the frontier was normally the Jordan, Dead Sea and the Gulf of Akaba, with the exception of the two fortress cities of Crak (Kerak) and Montreal (Shobek), in the mountainous country south-east of the Dead Sea, which command the caravan routes to Damascus.

Gaza and Darum belonged to the County of Jaffa in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and Darum, which is supposed to have been the southernmost post on the frontier, was a castle erected presumably at Rafa. Unfortunately there is no trace whatsoever of it at the present time, and if Darum is correctly placed as Rafa one can only conclude that the

castle stood near the sea-shore and is now covered by the sand dunes, which is a quite possible explanation. On the other hand, the Arabs insist that the Asakir el Seleeb (Crusaders) had an outpost near El Arish, either in the town itself or at Filusiat at the eastern end of the Bardawil Lake, and possibly at both places. At Filusiat, the Ostracine of Roman days, there are ruins of all descriptions, and it is quite possible that even if no Crusader castle existed the Franks maintained a fortified post there. Incidentally, near Sheikh Zowaid, twelve miles east of Rafa, there is a spot called el Burj; the word Burj in Arabic means a fortified town, but there is nothing there that suggests a Burj. The name, however, would not have been given to the spot without a reason, and one can only conclude that a castle did exist there at some period, but whether it was of Crusader or Roman origin is a moot point.

The fact remains that Baldwin II. died at El Arish in 1131 A.D., but the cause of his death is uncertain. Historians say that he had led an expedition against Tel el Farama (Pelusium), where he ate some fish which disagreed with him so seriously that he died from (presumably) ptomaine poisoning at El Arish on his return from the raid. The Arab story is not nearly so prosaic—they say that Baldwin had come down to El Arish to inspect the outposts and to visit an Arab girl of his acquaintance. They believe that Baldwin possessed a magic cap which, when worn, made him invisible to his enemies, which must have been enormously in his favour when engaged in a rough-and-tumble with a



two-handed sword or battle-axe. His Saracen enemies prevailed upon the girl to steal this cap from Baldwin during the night, and the next morning Baldwin and his party were attacked by raiders and in the mêlée that followed Baldwin was killed. It is also said that Baldwin maintained an outpost of his own personal followers at Filusiat, and that when the Kingdom of Jerusalem fell in 1187 these men, cut off from help of any kind, embraced the Mohammedan faith and settled at Zaranik.

At Zaranik at the present time there is a large family of fishermen called Bardawil who are obviously not Arabs but are undoubtedly of European stock, and they state that their ancestors were Christians. The name Bardawil is incidentally almost the correct Arabic plural of Baldwin—the actual word should be Baldawil and the substitution of an ‘r’ for an ‘l’ in the course of nearly 900 years is not remarkable.

A few years ago two of the Bardawil were arrested for smuggling and were sentenced by the Customs Officer at Port Said to a heavy term of imprisonment. He was rather alarmed when I informed him that he had tried and convicted the cousins of the then Prime Minister of England, and was rather afraid for the moment that he might be the cause of another political incident.

Sinai did not play a very important part in the Crusades except as the highway linking Egypt with Palestine. Egypt at that time was suffering from one of her periods of weakness due to internal troubles, and though the Franks made no attempt to colonise the Nile Valley they were strong enough to send



raiding parties across the desert and exact an annual tribute from Egypt. In 1163 A.D., however, the Syrian Moslem Kingdom, with its Capital at Damascus, was increasing in power, and Egypt entered into a secret treaty with Nur ed Din, then King of Damascus, to occupy Egypt, and to prevent this an army of Crusaders marched across Sinai and defeated the Egyptian Army at Bilbeis. A compromise was effected and Almaric returned to Palestine, whereupon the Syrians sent an army across to Egypt, and, defeating the Egyptians again at Bilbeis, succeeded in cancelling the treaty with the Franks. Amalric then led his army back to Egypt, allied himself with the Egyptians, and besieged the Syrians at Bilbeis for three months, at the end of which an armistice was concluded, and the Syrians under Shirkuh, a Turcoman, were allowed to march back across Sinai with the honours of war.

In 1167 A.D. Shirkuh led an army across Central Sinai *via* the Ras el Nagb and Nekhl to the Nile at Atfih, forty miles south of Cairo. He followed the central route to avoid hostilities with the Crusaders, but Almaric, hearing of the move, also sent an army to Egypt. The Egyptians allied themselves with the Franks and a battle took place at Minieh, where the Franks and Egyptians were defeated. Shirkuh then sent Saladin to occupy Alexandria, and the allied army of Egyptians and Franks invested him in the city, whilst a Frankish fleet from Palestine blockaded the town from the sea. The siege ended in a stalemate, and a treaty was arranged by which the Syrians and Franks evacuated Egypt, but the Franks maintained a High Commissioner

at Cairo and exacted a tribute. The following year, however, Amalric decided on the conquest of Egypt, and once again marching across Sinai besieged Fustat, the old Capital. The Caliph of Egypt, Shawar, gave orders that it was to be burnt to prevent it falling into the Crusaders' hands, and the town was utterly destroyed.

The Crusaders then marched on Cairo ; but whilst they were preparing for the siege a Syrian army, under Saladin, arrived from Damascus, and Amalric retired. Saladin then became Vizier of Egypt, and the Franks, realising the danger of a strong and well-organised foe to the south of their kingdom as well as to the north, allied themselves with the Greeks and made a joint attack by land and sea on Damietta. The Crusaders marched across Sinai and invested Damietta by land, whilst a Greek fleet of 220 ships blockaded it from the sea. The siege lasted for five weeks, during which time the Christians suffered from the cold and wet and shortage of food, and were also harried by Saladin's forces, who cut off all supplies from the Nile Valley. A gale that destroyed a large portion of the Greek fleet convinced Amalric of the hopelessness of the attempt, and, patching up a peace with Saladin, he retired on Palestine. Saladin, however, followed him across Sinai and made an attack on Darum, which was ably defended by Ansel de Pass and the Knight Templars. Failing to take Darum, he marched on Gaza, sacked the town and retired to Egypt with his booty.

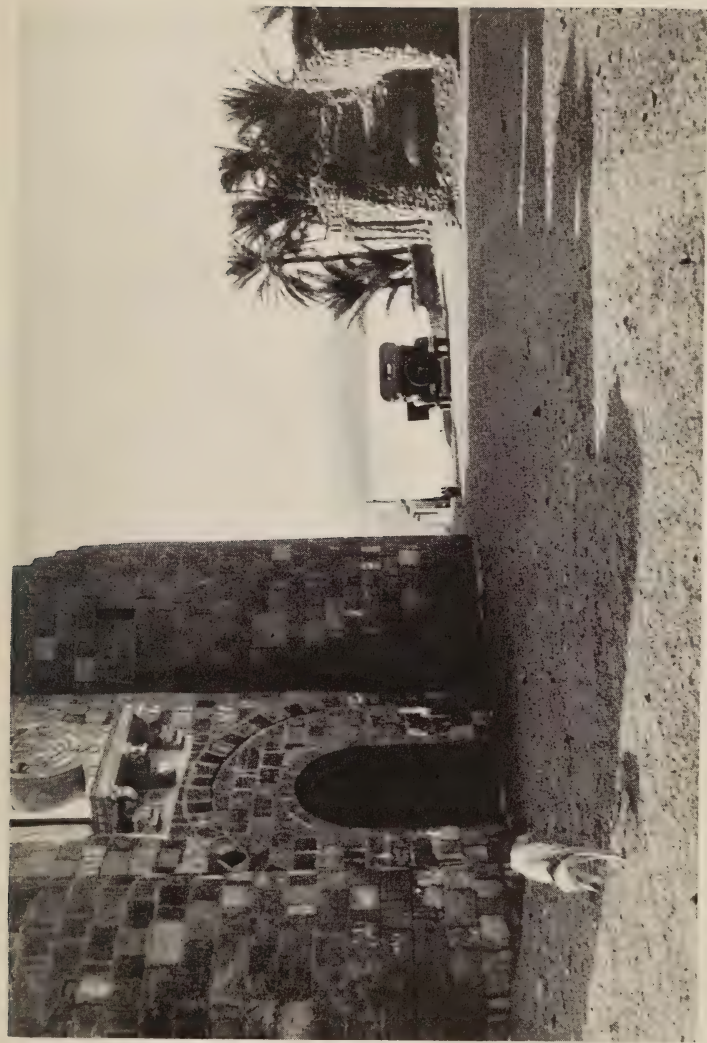
From the earliest days of the Frankish Kingdom the Crusaders had realised the importance of the

Gulf of Akaba, and the immensely strong castles of Kerak and Shobek were constructed partly with a view to controlling the trade between Egypt and the Moslem stronghold of Damascus, and partly as fortified posts on the road to the head of the Gulf. At Akaba itself they built a castle called Eylā, and they also constructed a fortified post called Graye, on Gezira Faroan, a small island some four hundred yards off the Sinai coast at Taba. No traces of the castle at Akaba remain, though it is more than probable that the existing fort attributed to the Sultan Selim in the sixteenth century is the original Crusader building repaired and reconstructed in Saracen fashion. The castle on Gezira Faroan still remains ; though this also has been added to and repaired, and some of the plastering in the inner rooms was evidently carried out as recently as the nineteenth century.

It is difficult to understand what strategic value the island has, as it is separated from the mainland by a very deep channel swarming with sharks, and has, incidentally, no water supply. It certainly commands the Akaba Gulf route into Southern Sinai, but as other routes exist this is by no means vital. It is said that during the 7th Crusade, when Louis IX. was captured by the Egyptians at Mansourah, the King was imprisoned here whilst negotiations were in progress for his ransom.

Saladin captured Faroan and Akaba in the year 1170 A.D., and to enable him to make an attack from the sea he carried sections of ships across the Sinai Desert on camels and put them together on the shores of the Gulf. This idea was not a new one,





The old Castle at Akaba—Eyla of the Crusades.





as Renaud de Chatillon, who was overlord of Kerak, had done precisely the same thing some years previously. He had had ships constructed in sections at Jaffa, and, carrying them on camels down the Wadi Araba, put them together at Akaba and equipped a small fleet with which he laid waste the Moslem ports of Yambo, Kosseir and Jeddah. This was a most daring and gallant enterprise, as apparently there were only two ships, and the numbers of men they carried could not have been great; yet he effectually swept the Red Sea of all Saracen shipping, paralysed the sea-borne trade of Egypt, and even attempted a march across the desert with the object of laying waste Mecca and destroying the tomb of Mohammed. Eventually the ships lost touch with one another—one was wrecked on the Hedjaz coast, and the survivors attempted to march back through Arabia to Kerak; and some of them actually succeeded, though the majority were killed by the Arabs. The other ship was captured by Saladin's fleet and its crew put to death.

The next twelve years appear to have been moderately peaceful; but in 1182 A.D. Saladin marched across Sinai *via* the central route, entered Trans-Jordan by the Akaba road and proceeded to lay waste the country round Kerak and Shobek. This was the beginning of Saladin's campaign against the Frankish Kingdom, which concluded only with the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 A.D., Acre in 1191 A.D., and the peace of 1192 A.D., by which the King of England retained only the coast towns between Acre and Jaffa.

In 1517 A.D. Sultan Selim, the Turk, invaded

Egypt by way of the Sinai coast road, and from that date till the Great War of 1914 Egypt remained a tributary State of Turkey. Sultan Selim was responsible for building the forts at El Arish, Nekhl and Akaba, and maintaining in them Moorish soldiers who were charged with the protection of pilgrims. The descendants of these Moorish soldiers still exist as a distinct race in Nekhl and Akaba; but in El Arish they have become absorbed in the general population.

At the Ras el Nagb above Akaba, where the huge plateau of Central Sinai suddenly falls away 2,460 feet to sea level, there is an ancient road winding down the precipitous sides of the mountain. This track was repaired sufficiently in 1831 A.D. to enable Ibrahim Pasha to get his artillery and transport down for the conquest of the Hedjaz, but the road was originally cut by Sultan el Malik el Ashraf Khansuh el Ghuri, as a stone was found lying in the road with the following inscription :—

“The cutting of this blessed road was ordered by our Master, Sultan el Malik el Ashraf Khansuh el Ghuri. May his help be strong who also erected in this blessed Khan towers for the deposits of the pilgrims.”

This stone has now been re-erected by the Frontiers Administration and set in a bed of concrete at the head of the Pass.

The next invasion of any importance to pass through Sinai was that of Napoleon in 1799; but the original intention of passing through Sinai and Arabia for the conquest of India had been discarded owing to the complete destruction of the French

fleet in Aboukir Bay by Nelson on 1st August 1798; and the attack on Syria was, to all intents and purposes, framed with the idea of opening up direct communication with France by way of Constantinople, now that all hope of maintaining the sea route was gone.

The strategical factor was also a consideration, as during the Napoleonic Wars the subjugation of Austria and Italy was one of the chief aims of Bonaparte; and even in those early days of his career he no doubt foresaw a war with Russia, so that the maintenance of a base in the Levant was of considerable importance. This, incidentally, he achieved later, when, after Austerlitz and Jena, he forced Turkey in 1807 to become an ally; but by this time his commitments in Central Europe prevented the fulfilment of his scheme to conquer the East.

The army that Napoleon brought to Egypt was of the finest material, and was organised as cadres with the view to considerable expansion by means of local enlistment. It numbered 30,000 only, and this number was insufficient if he intended to fight his way across Sinai, Palestine and Arabia, and expel the British from India. He had, however, intended to increase largely the army by enlisting Egyptians, Sudanese and Turks, and with his gift for organisation there is little doubt that he would have succeeded in raising a vast army had not the battle of the Nile completely disorganised his plans.

Napoleon, having decided on an advance to Constantinople, despatched General Lagrange with 600 men from Salheyeh, north of Bilbeis, on the 4th January 1799, with instructions to form an advanced



base at Katia, and get in touch with the local Arabs with a view to the provision of camels. To facilitate the maintenance of supplies he arranged for a convoy of small coasting vessels to sail from Damietta and land their cargoes on the Sinai shore at Tina. These coasting vessels accompanied the invading army as far as El Arish, but apparently found, as did Murray in 1916, that the Sinai coast is a most difficult one for beach landings. The seas are seldom very heavy, but a ridge of sand about fifty yards from the shore causes a steep wave that will effectually overturn any boat, whilst if the wind is at all strong it is a dangerous lee shore for a ship to approach.

Lagrange occupied Katia three days later without any resistance on the part of the enemy and constructed there a strong post by making palisading of palm branches with gun emplacements of palm trunks. On the 6th February, Generals Reynier and Kléber arrived at Katia with the army detailed for the advance on Syria. It consisted of 13,000 men, of whom 10,000 were infantry and 800 cavalry; whilst a Camel Corps force was formed by selecting fifteen men from each battalion, which was precisely what General Murray did 116 years later. General Reynier immediately pushed on with the advance guard, and two and a half days later had reached Masaid—five and a half miles from El Arish—which is a very fine feat for infantry considering the heavy going.

He found El Arish strongly held, and though he pushed the enemy back across the wadi he was quite unable to take the fort and village with the

force at his disposal. The village of El Arish consists of a mass of mud-brick houses built inside yards surrounded by high walls. The streets at the present time in the new part of the village are straight and wide, but in the old quarter, which was in existence in Napoleon's days, the alleys between the houses are very narrow and winding. Any force attempting to take El Arish by means of a charge through the streets would have lost heavily. This apparently happened to Reynier, as he speaks of his men being cut off in cul-de-sacs. The fort stands at the north-west end of the town, and is surrounded by small houses, which added to Reynier's difficulties, as, although he effected a small breach in the walls, he was quite unable to storm it.

Kléber arrived with a division on the 14th February and found the village and fort still holding out ; whilst the Turks, encamped on the east side of the wadi, had been reinforced by troops from Khan Yunis, so that Reynier's position was a difficult one. Reynier, who was Kléber's senior, decided on a night attack, and despatched a force to move round the left flank of the enemy to the south, whilst the remainder made a feint on the front. The movement was a complete success, as a charge by the Mamelukes was broken up by the French infantry, and the whole Turkish army, which consisted of Maghrabis (Western Arabs), Mamelukes (Egyptians), Albanians and Arabs, fled in disorder towards Gaza.

On the 10th February Napoleon left Cairo and seven days later arrived at El Arish, which is very rapid travelling considering that over a hundred miles of the journey had to be done by camel. The

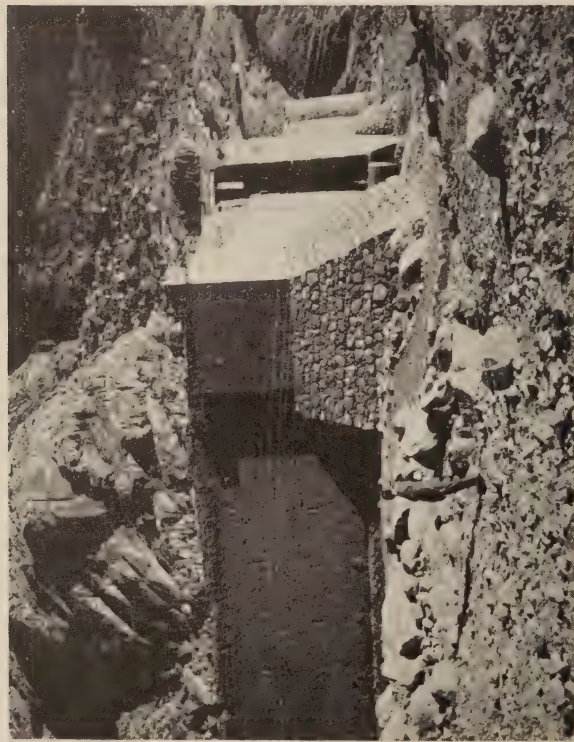
following day he ordered the reduction of the fort, which was still holding out—the town was cleared of inhabitants and the guns advanced so that they could open fire at close range and effect breaches in the walls. Although the fort went down in a tumbled heap in 1915, after a few naval shells had found their mark, it was a very formidable mass of masonry to batter down with the cannon of 1799, and Napoleon's troops found it a difficult nut to crack. On the 20th a breach had been made, but the defenders blocked it with stones and palm trunks, and Napoleon, realising that he would lose valuable men he could ill spare by an assault, sent the following letter to the commander of the garrison:—

“ Le Général en Chef me charge de vous faire connaître que le brèche commence à être praticable ; que les lois de la guerre chez tous les peuples sont que la garrison d'une ville prise d'assaut doit être passée au fil de l'épée ; que votre conduite dans cette circonstance n'est qu'une folie, de laquelle il a pitié, et que la générosité l'oblige à vous sommer pour la dernière fois. . . .”

This had the required effect, as the Commander, Ibrahim Nizam Bey, realising that they were hopelessly cut off, surrendered with the garrison of 1500 men and 150 horses. It is rather a mystery, considering that the fort is quite a small one, how such a large force managed to squeeze itself into the limited area. Of the garrison the Turks were compelled to retire to Baghdad *via* the desert ; the Egyptians were sent back to Cairo, and the Maghrabis and Greeks enlisted into the French Army.







The Monastery of Mt. Sinai.



The Tombstone of the Turkish Commander-in-Chief, killed in the war with Napoleon.

A tombstone was recently unearthed in El Arish with the following inscription in Arabic on it :—

“ In the name of God the Merciful.

Praise be to God the Father of all, and God’s worship on the chosen of all Prophets.

Ye haunting of the place vouch forgiveness of the Almighty to the poor interred under earth, supplicating Him through the noble race.

He who supplicates, trusts and asks forgiveness from God will not be disappointed.

Emir El Lewa Qaid el Maghazi, for the sake of God, is asking forgiveness and blessings.

Killed on 10th . . . 1215.”

The date 1215 is according to the Mohammedan calendar, and is roughly 134 Arabic years ago. Making due allowance for the fact that the Mohammedan year is from five to ten days less than the Gregorian year, and taking into consideration the fact that the month of the death of the Emir is undecipherable, it is fairly certain that this officer was killed in the year 1799 or 1800, either during the fighting which took place with the French advance or later when Kléber remained at El Arish after the retreat from Acre. It is to be regretted that only the rank of the Turkish General is given and not his name, but the title “El Lewa Qaid” rather suggests that he was Commander-in-Chief.

Among other interesting documents that bear on this campaign is a note on the Arab tribes of Sinai, stating that the Billi, Sawalha and Terrabin tribes are well-disposed and can be trusted, but that

the Howietat and Ayada are treacherous and should be treated as enemies. At the present time both the Billi and Sawalha tribes have so shrunk in size that one would hardly take the trouble to mention them, but the Sawalha maintain their characteristics and are still a reliable and pleasant people. The Terrabin are now the largest tribe, and also still live up to the reputation given them by Napoleon. Incidentally, the existing sheikh is either a grandson or great-grandson of the sheikh who served Napoleon, and is a magnificent specimen of a fine old Arab gentleman.

There was, till quite recently, an old man in Sheikh Zowaid reputed to be 150 years of age, and who was a young man when Napoleon and his troops marched through Sinai. I went to see him to get some information, and he was brought out from his house and propped up in the sun. He certainly looked quite 150, if not more, and his relatives were most emphatic that he had actually seen 'Napolio' and his troops. The old man then joined in the conversation and gave me a graphic account of their passing through Sinai, and I became vastly interested till he mentioned Napolio riding at the head of cavalry who wore slouch hats and were called Orstrylians, and infantry clad in skirts; and I then realised I was listening to an account of Murray's advance in 1916. Unfortunately the old man refused to leave the topic, and whenever I tried to sort out the two campaigns, interrupted me and continued his account of what he did in the Great War. Next time I visited Sheikh Zowaid the old fellow had passed on, so, though I have met a man



who probably saw Napoleon, I failed to get an account of the incident.

The army marched out of El Arish on the 21st February and reached Sheikh Zowaid two days later; the Arab guide having led them too far to the south so that the troops had an uncomfortable time among the sand dunes. No resistance was met with from the enemy, and Napoleon, after some fighting at Gaza, which he found an easier nut to crack than we did in 1917—for the simple reason that the Turks had insufficient men to extend their line towards Beersheba—moved on to Acre, which he failed to take owing to the co-operation with the Turks of Sir Sidney Smith and the British Fleet.

On the 2nd June Napoleon and his army arrived back in El Arish, the attempt to reach Constantinople having failed. Their losses in the fighting at Acre and Jaffa had not been heavy; but plague had broken out amongst the troops, accounting for many deaths, whilst a number of men had died of exhaustion and thirst during the long marches in the summer heat across the desert. Some hundreds of wounded and sick were left at Gaza at the mercy of the inhabitants and advancing Turks, and their fate is obscure; but from Sir Sidney Smith's despatches the English officers serving with the Turkish Army appear to have made themselves responsible for their safety, and some, at least, were evacuated in British men-of-war.

On the 3rd June Napoleon left El Arish for Cairo, having detailed a force of 500 men and 10 guns to occupy the fort and prevent an advance of Turks



along the Sinai road to Egypt. A small outpost was also established at Katia, with the object of maintaining communications between El Arish and the Nile Valley ; but it is difficult to believe that Napoleon really imagined that this small party could actually hold back the very large force that the Turks could at any moment bring across Palestine if they desired to make an attack on Egypt. It seems probable that the failure at Acre had convinced Napoleon of the hopelessness of his position—cut off both by sea and land from France, with an army considerably reduced by casualties and sickness, and with no hope of reinforcements, he foresaw that, although the end was not yet, the troops in Egypt were doomed ultimately, unless by a series of hammer blows on his enemies in Europe he could force a peace which would recognise his occupation of the country. England and Russia had allied themselves with Turkey ; and the Russian and Turkish Fleets, though far from efficient, were quite capable of maintaining a blockade if Great Britain provided a stiffening from the British Fleet. The Turkish Army was being reorganised and trained by British officers, and though short of munitions and artillery Turkey had such an inexhaustible supply of cannon-fodder that, despite the fact that the French had little difficulty in defeating them in any battle in the open, the process of attrition could have only one result. Great Britain viewed the presence of Napoleon in Egypt with the greatest concern, and it was obvious that she would leave no stone unturned to compel her allies to drive him out ; moreover, there were already rumours of a

British Expeditionary Force, though, incidentally, this did not materialise till the spring of 1801. By staying with his men in Egypt Napoleon might have postponed the end for a year or so, but his presence was far more essential in France, where the internal situation was by no means satisfactory and the necessity for a leader of men urgent, than fighting a forlorn hope in Egypt. On the 22nd August, 1799, he sailed away in the *Muiron* frigate, and, evading the blockading fleet by hugging the African shore, he arrived safely in Paris on the 15th October.

Kléber, who took over command from Napoleon, had no enviable task, as the departure of the Commander-in-Chief caused a considerable amount of despondency among the senior French officers and inspired the Allies to greater efforts. The Egyptian population were excited and hostile, so that when Sir Sidney Smith arrived off Damietta in October, Kléber was in a frame of mind to negotiate if he could secure honourable and satisfactory terms. An armistice was arranged, and French delegates went on board the H.M.S. *Tiger* to discuss the conditions of evacuation, but Kléber's terms were rather those of a victor than of a General who found himself in a tight corner, and negotiations dragged on slowly.

Unfortunately the armistice was not made known to the troops in Palestine, and in December the Turks advancing laid siege to the fort of El Arish. Colonel Cazals, who was then in command, was a most gallant and resourceful officer, and his official despatch describing the siege, though somewhat

redundant, gives a very clear idea of his attempt to hold the fort against the enemy :—

“ In the Turkish camp of El Arish, this 10th nivôse of the 8th year of the French Republic (31st December 1799). Cazals, Chief of the Battalion de Genie to the Commander-in-Chief, Kléber.

“ I have the honour to give you an account, my General, of the fact that the 1st inst. a part of the Turkish Army, commanded by Radjab Pasha, arrived to invest the fort of El Arish.

“ A considerable number of horsemen, under the orders of Ibrahim Bey, took up a position in the neighbourhood of Masaid wells, with the purpose of cutting off communication with Egypt.

“ Being summoned to surrender the fort into the hands of the Turks, I replied that I must defend to the last moment the place entrusted to me, as my honour and duty required.

“ In the evening I sent an Arab to Katia ; he was bearer of a message announcing the movements of the enemy. The Turks, on the night of the 1st-2nd, established a battery of mortars and opened fire on the trenches in front of the gateway on the north side. The first parallel, dug by 2000 men under the supervision of English officers, crowned all the heights and extended over an average distance of 500 yards from the fort ; their direction was determined by 200 flags of all colours planted on the reverse slope. On the 2nd the enemy improved the first line, and worked at establishing some batteries on which I directed the fire of the fort.

“ In the outside circle of the fort I occupied that part of the enceinte guarding the gate, the ditches of the bastions of the north and east ; moreover, I established an advanced post on the side facing the front on which the attack was being made, at a distance of 280 yards from the fort. The sloping bank and ruins around the fort were defended by a detachment of scouts selected from the Sappers.

“ Immediately on the arrival of the Ottoman Army I filled the surrounding tanks, made ready the batteries and strengthened their parapets, and protected the doors of the



magazines with steel plates, constructed platforms for firing in the ditch situated on the north, put a trench around the well on the glacis on the east side, also the parapets were reinforced by sacks of sand and wooden firing-steps were constructed behind.

“By the night of the 2nd-3rd the enemy had dug a second line at a distance of 200 yards from the first, and established two batteries of eight and six calibre cannon, being directed on the two towers on the north side. During the 3rd, early in the morning, the Turkish batteries commenced a very violent fire that continued all day and part of the night, and in spite of the inferiority of our armament (each tower is only provided with two loopholes for firing that cannot be used at the same time) the accuracy and rapidity of our fire at once established an obvious superiority.

“The same day the Grand Vizier arrived at El Arish with a considerable force of artillery and infantry. He was accompanied by an English Colonel, named Douglas, and the Lieutenant-Colonel of Artillery, Bromly, and several other officers and soldiers of the same Army.

“On the morning of the 5th the enemy, having established themselves on the glacis and ruins facing the gate, worried the gunners of the tower by their fire. I ordered a sortie and, after a stubborn fight, the Turks were forced to retire, carrying the wounded over their shoulders. Towards evening, being warned that some seditious speeches had been made in the different posts and in the fort, and that there was disaffection in the garrison, I gave instructions to the commanders of the different corps to the effect that they should take the steps they considered necessary to put a stop to this state of affairs. The posts were established as on the previous day, everything bearing the appearance of tranquillity, when at 8 o'clock at night a letter was brought to me bearing about eighty signatures, written in the name of the garrison and inviting me to surrender the place, fixing a time—twelve hours later—for me to comply with their wishes (the letter is before me now).

“During the 5th, very early in the morning, I called for all the troops of the different corps, leaving outside the necessary guards. The flag of the battalion of the 13th demi-Brigade having arrived, I made a speech to the soldiers (the garrison of El Arish), pointing out to them



their disgrace, and saying that it was the first time the French had wished to surrender in this cowardly fashion rather than fight the enemy. 'Have you forgotten that you form the advanced troops of the Army, and that your brothers in arms rely upon you to hold back the enemy while they prepare to advance to your help?' I afterwards drew their attention to the advantage of our actual position, and assured them that their fears were groundless. Moreover, I reminded them of the fact that they had been led away by bad advice and the hope of a return to France, a country which would certainly repel from its bosom those who would bring shame and dishonour upon it, and, finally, reminded them of the obligations of honour and duty incumbent upon everybody.

"I was interrupted by seditious cries uttered by a party of Grenadiers from the commencement of my speech, and no sooner had the speech terminated than they began to create a disturbance. The troops persisted in their disgraceful attitude; the battery commanders and the officers of the garrison spoke to the soldiers, adding their efforts to mine, but, the uproar increasing, I appealed for silence.

"Now, soldiers," I said, 'since you are not satisfied with what I have said, and as some of you still insist upon shame and dishonour, I will open the gate and the cowards can withdraw and join the enemy; as for myself, I will fight to the last moment with the officers and brave men who still have French feelings.'

"The mutiny continuing, I ordered the opening of the gate, whereupon every man fell into his place; but this untoward event aroused in me a fear for the future. Having called all the officers together, I proposed to arrest those men who seemed to be leaders of the mutiny. They replied unanimously that in the circumstances this could not be carried out, taking into consideration the great number of signatories, which represented the majority of the troops, and the general dissatisfaction prevailing in the garrison. These men, having learned from the detachment recently arrived from Katia that the troops occupying this place had received orders to evacuate the post and return to Egypt on the arrival of the enemy, considered that they had been sacrificed.

"The fire of the artillery and musketry, which was very

intense from all sides from the beginning of the siege, continued during the day. The absence of necessary shelter and the lack of room in the inside of the fort, part of which lay in ruins, contributed to the loss we sustained from the great number of bombs, shots and balls fired by the enemy. . . .

“During the 6th the Turks established a battery at a distance nearer than the preceding ones, from which they kept up a steady fire, and by night they dug a new trench at a distance of 300 yards on the western side of the fort.

“During the 7th the English had ordered the establishment of a battery: it joined the curtain wall and the ditch of the north front, and was very close to the tower on the west side of the gate, against which the attack of the enemy would probably be directed.

“Soldiers who are acquainted with the fort of El Arish know that it is composed of four walls of a thickness of only seven feet and an average height of twenty-seven feet, and unprotected by earth redoubts and insufficiently reinforced by four weak towers, two sides of which do not effectually command the glacis. The parapet of these towers is only three feet thick, whilst that of the curtains is but half a foot thick. . . .

“Such was the fort of El Arish when the enemy arrived, which 400 French were called upon to defend against an army of 40,000 men.

“A considerable flotilla approached the shore, and, benefiting by a land breeze which blew steadily at night and in the morning, landed a great amount of provisions, which gave the Ottoman Army ample supplies, whilst water was plentiful, the wells of the surrounding country being all open. . . .

“I had hoped to sustain the siege so long as the munitions of war lasted, but disaffection prevailed in the garrison. The men persisted in regarding themselves as being sacrificed and preferred surrender to the enemy, in spite of all my efforts, and this ultimately was the cause of the terrible catastrophe which occurred the following day.

“On the night of 7th-8th I ordered the construction on the eastern glacis of a trench to prevent extension of the progress made by the enemy on the night of the 6th. Whilst executing this work the Turks, having reason to believe

that the fort was insufficiently protected, constructed another trench to the south at a distance of 200 yards; then grape-shot began to run short in the fort, whereupon the officers picked up the balls of the enemy which lay thick on the ground.

"On the 8th, seeing that the enemy had occupied the glacis on the south, I immediately decided to occupy the bastion, the construction of which had commenced before the siege. As soon as the banquette was completed the Turks rushed in considerable numbers from their trenches and established themselves within thirty yards of the bastion, while they attacked the lower post and threatened the other places we had occupied by a general assault.

"I ordered a sortie to clear the Turks out of the position they had occupied. The Captain de Grenadiers commanding the 13th Brigade, having been followed by only two men of his section, found himself alone in face of the enemy and was obliged to turn back. I went immediately to the fosse, and after ordering the opening of the barriers, I gave instructions to the Grenadiers, and different troops who happened to be there, to double out and attack the enemy. I repeated the order three times, but the Grenadiers replied that they would not advance farther, and, shocked by their cowardice, I ordered the closing of the barrier and the evacuation of the trench, holding only the ditch outside.

"The Turks then established themselves in the trench, in spite of the heavy musketry-fire and a storm of stones thrown upon them from the towers. However, a great uproar prevailed, mostly in the gateway where the Grenadiers were stationed. The soldiers cried loudly that they wished to surrender and stop fighting, saying that they had no hope of being saved, and that the enemy was very near the tower, that they were being sacrificed, &c., &c. I pointed out to them that our situation was most favourable, and that it would be impossible for the Turks to take advantage of the ground they had gained if we disputed it, and as for mines it would need time and means for their construction, and, moreover, we had prepared all that was necessary to prevent them. The disorder, however, increased, and those who were most excited cried out that they would fire on the officers, whilst some Grenadiers ran to the flag



to pull it down but were prevented from doing so by some officers. . . .

“Then the Turks rushed in mass towards the door and were helped through it by the Grenadiers, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I closed the gate and thus prevented the Turks from entering.

“I then determined to send a messenger, named Lieutenant de Génie Bonchard, to ask for an armistice for a few hours in order that I might make a last attempt to prevent the troops from surrender and dishonour, but when Lieutenant Bonchard was going out of the gate he found himself confronted by the enemy, who threw themselves upon the officer and disarmed him.

“While all this was happening the Turks, who were unopposed, climbed over the bastion and were assisted in this by our men, who hoisted the Turkish flag on the tower. Most of the mutineers received what they deserved: they were thrown off the tower and their heads cut off. . . .

“It was not until this moment that I surrendered, being surrounded by 30,000 enemy—in order to save, if possible, the surviving gunners. Radjab Pasha (War Minister) of the Turkish Army, who was at the gate of the fort in company with the Aga de Janissaries, put his seal on the document of capitulation, which was passed through a hole in the gate. It was signed and guaranteed by the English Colonel Douglas, who was hoisted into the fort by a rope. The garrison then surrendered as prisoners of war; the wounded, of which there were a great number, were recommended to the mercy of the Ottomans.

“By this time a great number of Turkish soldiers were inside the fort, where they committed the greatest atrocities; their officers did their best to restrain them, but the confusion was so great that their orders were ignored. In spite of the capitulation, El Arish Fort was a horrible spectacle of a place taken by assault. Heads were cut off, the wounded massacred; and, to add to the confusion, the eastern tower where the powder was stored blew up and buried both Turks and French with débris. . . .

“It was in such circumstances that the fort of El Arish fell into the hands of the Turks after seven days of hard fighting, and during this time 400 French had succeeded



in stopping an army of 40,000 persons, commanded by the Grand Vizier in person. . . .

"During the siege 240 French and 3000 Turks were killed. Among them was Mustapha Pasha, distinguished for bravery and humanity. Also Grampair, the Captain of Artillery, Nicolas, three other Captains of different corps and two Lieutenants were killed during the mutiny of the garrison, and their deaths were due to the cowardice of their troops. Lieutenant Du Dénie Piquet was killed some hours previously. . . .

"The munitions of war that fell into the enemy's hands were of little value ; the two howitzers being badly damaged and unserviceable ; two guns were buried under the ruins of the powder-magazine, while the remainder were mostly so damaged as to be of no further use.

"From the beginning of the siege I cannot speak too highly of the good conduct of the officers of different corps. Among those who still survive, and who are worthy of mention, are Lieutenant de Génie Bonchard, Captain of Artillery Daval, Adjutant Major Heronard and Captain Guit.

"Salutation and respect.

"CAZALS."

Kléber, after a heated protest at this violation of the truce, hurried on negotiations, the meetings taking place either in El Arish Fort or on board the British battleships which were anchored off the coast ; and on the 24th January, 1800, terms were drawn up which Sir Sidney Smith approved, but did not sign as he had not the authority to do so. The terms were more than generous, as they provided for the transport of the French Army in British or Turkish ships to France with all the honours of war and the payment of a three-million franc indemnity by Egypt to the French Republic. These conditions were repudiated by the Court of St James', and there followed a rebellion in Cairo

against the French, the assassination of Kléber, the victory of Abercrombie, and the final capitulation of the French troops on the 31st August, 1801.

In the year 1831 A.D., Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mohammed Ali, advanced through Sinai, and, defeating the Turkish Army at Acre, Homs and Aleppo, would have captured Constantinople but for the intervention of the Great Powers of Europe, who effected a peace between Turkey and her vassal. The exact status of Egypt, and the possession of Syria and Palestine, however, remained a bone of contention, and was not definitely settled till the Treaty of London in 1840, by which these States—which had been held by the Egyptians since 1831—were handed back to Turkey. Mohammed Ali refused to accept these terms, and sent a large army from Egypt, which, being heavily defeated by the Turks, convinced the Egyptian ruler of the hopelessness of his cause; and Egypt continued as a vassal state of the Porte till the Great War of 1914.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SINAI AND THE WAR.

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be.”—ECCLESIASTES i. 9.

As Sinai, in the course of known history, has seen no less than forty-five invading armies moving either to or from Egypt, it was inevitable when the Great War began in August, 1914, that sooner or later it would become once again a centre of hostilities. The Suez Canal, with its hundred miles of unprotected length, afforded a tempting bait, as every day through its waters passed lines of ships carrying Australians, New Zealanders, Indian troops and supplies of all kinds for our armies. Any check, however temporary, to this continuous stream of shipping would mean an irreparable hindrance to the allied cause, whilst the loss of the Canal would probably have altered the whole course of the war.

It had been obvious for the two years previous to 1914 that the increase of German influence in Constantinople would lead to Turkey's entrance into any war on the side of the Triple Alliance, and it is doubtful whether any diplomacy on our part could have prevented this. The only reason why Turkey did not declare war in August was that in all probability Germany did not consider that her active intervention was necessary till a decisive

blow had been struck against both France and Russia. The failure of the advance through Belgium and the check in Russia, together with the impending increase in the British Army by troops from the Antipodes and India, decided Germany to call on her new ally to do all in her power to interfere with the communications of the Suez Canal, and to draw off Russian pressure on the Austrians by an attack in the Caucasus.

It had been decided previously by the military authorities that in the event of an invasion Sinai should be evacuated owing to the difficulty of maintaining a supply system across a desert lacking roads and railways. It was considered that 120 miles of desert with indifferent water supplies would act as an efficient barrier in itself, and that no considerable force could possibly be brought from Palestine to operate against the Canal. That this theory was thoroughly unsound was proved by the attack made on the Canal on the 3rd February, 1915; and it is recorded that Kitchener, on seeing the Canal defences later in 1915, asked somewhat pertinently if the troops were defending the Canal or the Canal defending the troops.

Turkey entered the war at the end of October 1914, but for two months previous to open hostilities small Turkish patrols had been crossing the frontier and entering Sinai, and it was obvious that their agents were at work in all parts of the Peninsula, organising the tribes to take an active part immediately war started. Sinai at that time was not occupied by any British troops, but merely patrolled by a few Sinai Arab policeman and administered by a



British Governor, who had his headquarters at Nekhl.

A few days previous to the declaration of war a Turkish force advanced on El Arish, while strong patrols were sent to occupy the posts of Hassana and Nekhl. Nekhl Fort was blown up to prevent it falling into the hands of the Turks, and the Governor, with those of the police who remained loyal, retired on Suez. On the 15th November a patrol of the Egyptian Coastguard Camel Corps came into contact with a strong force of the enemy at Bir el Nus, twenty miles from Kantara, and withdrew after a sharp fight ; and after this encounter Sinai was left to the enemy and only reconnoitring patrols from the Canal were made.

The objective of the Turks being the Canal, they had to decide which of three possible routes they would choose for their advance. The normal and best-watered route is that which follows the line of the existing railway from El Arish through Mazar, Bir el Abd, Romani to Kantara ; but the Turks have a healthy respect for the British Navy, and the possibility of a flank attack from the sea caused them to discard this in favour of the central road *via* Kosseima, Hassana, to the Canal at Ismailieh. The third route *via* Nekhl and the Wadi el Haj to Suez they merely used for feint attacks.

The advantage of the central road *via* Hassana is that for the first hundred miles or so from the frontier the desert is hard gravel, whereas the northern route is across sand dunes ; but an offset against this is the lack of water on the central road. The Turks, assisted by German engineers, made the

most of the existing water-holes, and by constructing reservoirs and tanks maintained efficient watering-places every fifteen miles ; one of the biggest undertakings being the carrying of the water from the spring at Gedeirat by means of an eight-inch pipe-line to Dheiga, sixteen miles away. The last well on the route is Jiffjaffa, with an indifferent supply ; but fortune was with the Turks, as a few days previous to their advance there was heavy rain all over Sinai, and a big depression at the end of Wadi Muksheib filled with water, thus providing the advancing army with a first-class supply of fresh water about thirty-two miles from the Canal.

The advance against the Canal started on about the 13th January, when a considerable force arrived at Kosseima ; and at the same time troops were reported at El Arish and Nekhl. The central force, which was equipped with heavy artillery and a pontoon train, was within striking distance of the Canal opposite Ismailieh on the 26th January, the heavy guns and pontoons having been dragged across the desert by teams of oxen. Feint attacks were made at several different points along the Canal, but the main attempt was made between Serapeum and Tussum on the night of the 2nd February. The pontoons were brought down to the Canal bank and several were launched ; but owing to heavy fire opened on them by the Egyptian Artillery, only three succeeded in crossing ; and the occupants were all killed or taken prisoners. The remaining pontoons, riddled with bullet- and shell-holes, were either sunk or left on the east bank.

A second attempt to cross was made on the 3rd,

but was driven off by heavy fire ; and the Turks then withdrew, losing 60 killed and 300 prisoners. Owing to lack of mounted troops the retreating enemy were able to retire without loss, and the attempt on the Canal, though a failure, proved that the Sinai Desert was not an impassable barrier, and that defending the Canal from the west bank was useless, as, even if an actual crossing were prevented, the Canal itself was exposed to enemy fire and effectually blocked.

At this period of the war there was a most extraordinary and confusing complexity of commands in Egypt that savoured more of a Savoy opera than actual warfare. General Sir John Maxwell was in command of the force in Egypt ; independent of him was an office organisation that dealt with Gallipoli, Mesopotamia and Salonika under General Altham, called the Levant Base ; whilst there was a third organisation called the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force under General Sir Archibald Murray. All these forces were independent and extremely jealous of each other, and the situation is best summed up by the following rather blasphemous effusion, said to have been written by an Australian medical officer. (Whoever wrote it was a benefactor to the British cause, as a copy's reaching the War Office resulted in immediate reorganisation.)

" Whosoever will be decorated : before all things it is necessary that he hold the Mediterranean Faith. Which Faith, except everyone do keep whole or undefiled, without doubt he shall be stellenbosched everlastingly. And the Mediterranean Faith is this : that we worship one G.O.C. in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Both confounding the Generals and damning their commands. For there is one



General in Egypt, another of the M.E.F. and another of the Levant Base. But the authority of Egypt, of the M.E.F. and of the Levant Base is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as Egypt is, such is the M.E.F. and such is the Levant Base. Egypt separate, the M.E.F. separate and the Levant Base separate; Egypt incomprehensible, the M.E.F. incomprehensible and the Levant Base incomprehensible; Egypt futile, the M.E.F. futile and the Levant Base futile; and yet there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three separates, but one inchoate and incomprehensible. So likewise Egypt is Almighty, the M.E.F. almighty and the Levant Base almighty, and yet there are not three almighties but one almighty.

“So Maxwell is G.O.C., Murray is G.O.C. and Altham is G.O.C. And yet there cannot be three G.O.C.’s but one G.O.C. So likewise Maxwell is boss, Murray is boss and Altham is boss. For whereas we are compelled by the Army Regulations to acknowledge every General by himself to be G.O.C. and boss; so are we forbidden by Lord K. of K. to say there be three G.O.C.’s and three bosses.

“Egypt is made of none, but separate and misbegotten. The M.E.F. is of the sea alone; not ashore but separate and misbegotten. The Levant Base is of Egypt and the M.E.F. both ashore and separate, but misbegotten and not succeeding. So there is one Egypt and not three Egypts, one M.E.F. and not three M.E.F.’s, and one Levant Base and not three Levant Bases. And in the Trinity none is before nor after, none is greater nor less than another.

“But the whole three Generals are quarrelling together and quibbling, so that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that would be decorated must thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary for everlasting promotion that he also believe rightly the appointment of our G.O.C., Sir Archibald Murray. For the right faith is this, that we believe and confess that Sir Archibald Murray is G.O.C. and M.E.F. Equal to Maxwell as touching his troops and inferior to Maxwell as touching his administration. For although he be G.O.C. and M.E.F. yet he has not two but one command. One altogether not alone by confusion of Generals, but by complexity of commands.



For as the reasonable and flesh is one man so shall Murray and Altham be one command. We suffered for this re-organisation, for Murray descended into Alexandria and rose again the second day with a disordered brain. He ascended into Cairo, he sitteth on the top of Maxwell G.O.C. Almighty, whence he shall come to take troops, the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again in their brevets, and shall immediately proceed to damn each other and their works. And they that have done this shall go into the Honours List everlastingly, and they that have done evil into everlasting retirement. This is the Mediterranean Faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be promoted. Glory be to Egypt, and to the one M.E.F. and to the Levant Base, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, Chaos without end.

“AMEN.”

No further attempt on Egypt was made till July, 1916, and by this time our defences had been pushed out some fifteen miles east of the Canal into the Sinai Desert, so that the shelling of passing ships with long-range guns was no longer possible. The Turks had occupied themselves during the interval in advancing the railway line from Beersheba in southern Palestine, across the intervening desert to Auja and thence to Kosseima ; and the work controlled by German engineers showed that thoroughness and perfection of detail—a thoroughness that was unnecessary considering the line was required as a temporary military measure only—so characteristic of the race. The fact remains that the Turks in the two years they had at their disposal had advanced the line only ten miles over the border, when they were compelled to fall back owing to the British occupation of El Arish ; whereas when Murray made his advance eastwards he constructed the existing

railway line across Sinai in six months. The line made by Murray was a temporary affair laid on the sand and liable to wash-outs, but it served its purpose; and trains running at twenty-five miles an hour kept up with the advance and maintained all supplies. The Turkish line was provided with magnificent cut-stone bridges and culverts, perfectly graded and metalled, and equipped with stations with stone water-towers and platforms. Had the time expended upon these unnecessary details been used to push the line forward to the Canal, the Turks might have had the railhead ten miles from Ismailieh in nine months; and with the Turkish force available, backed by some 10,000 German troops, the forcing of the Canal might have been possible. It is difficult to understand the delay, unless shortage of railway material and difficulties of transport hindered rapid construction, and the engineering gangs occupied the time in perfecting the line while waiting for the rails and sleepers to arrive.

During the lull in hostilities, which was largely forced upon the Turks by withdrawal of their forces to meet the Gallipoli landing and the British advance in Mesopotamia, some attempt was made to form a Beduin Irregular Force in Sinai to raid our outposts on the Canal and capture Tor, which, as the Quarantine Station of Egypt, had not been evacuated with the rest of Sinai. A force of Beduin, with a backing of Turkish soldiery, destroyed the Mining Company's machinery and plant at Abu Zeneima, and made an abortive attack on Tor, which was driven off with heavy casualties to the enemy by

the Ghurka regiment entrusted with its defence. The Arabs suffered considerable loss, and this appeared to satisfy their martial ardour, as they took no further part in the war except to act as secret service agents to both sides in turn.

On the 24th April, 1916, occurred the Oghratina disaster; when a column of 2,000 Turks surprised a Yeomanry outpost and killed or captured the whole force of three squadrons, and this was followed in July by a general enemy advance along the northern route of an army estimated at 18,000 men. It is difficult to understand the reason for this advance, as the British trench and redoubt system was very strong and ample troops for the defence of the Canal were available. A force of 18,000 had not the slightest chance of forcing the Canal line, and it can only be concluded that the German authorities had ordered a general liveliness to prevent withdrawal of further British troops to the western theatre of war.

The Turks, marching from Kosseima, arrived in the Katia area in the middle of July, and remained there encamped till the beginning of August. The country in this part of Sinai is most difficult for military operations, as it consists of undulating sand dunes, under the lee of which are small dense groves of palm trees. These groves are called hods, and water can be obtained anywhere at the depth of a few feet. This water, however, is saline and injurious to health; and General Murray, knowing this, was in no great hurry to force conclusions. The driving out of the Turks from the hods of Katia would be a costly business, and he preferred to leave



the initiative with the enemy, knowing that the longer they stayed in this unhealthy area the greater the number of casualties from dysentery and typhoid and general disorganisation of their forces.

On the 3rd August the Turkish advance began with a night attack on a position held by the Australian Light Horse to the south of Romani. The Turks were in superior force, but the Australians fought doggedly, and, being reinforced by New Zealand troops and Yeomanry at mid-day on the 4th, held their position, inflicting considerable loss on the enemy. The Turks, exhausted by their efforts and hampered by the soft going, were then counter-attacked by the 52nd Lowland Scottish and 42nd Lancashire Divisions, who attempted an encircling movement. But for the heavy sand the destruction of the whole Turkish force would have been possible; but the great heat, soft going, and water shortage caused insuperable difficulties to the cavalry pursuit, and the Turks managed to withdraw with the loss of half their force, 4,000 of whom were taken prisoners.

Immediately after the battle of Romani, Murray began his advance on El Arish, pushing the railway forward as the patrols advanced, and laying at the same time the famous 12-inch pipe-line which brought water from the Sweet Water Canal at Kantara, over 135 miles across the desert, to Palestine. Incidentally, the Arabs have a legend that when the waters of the Nile flowed into Palestine then Jerusalem would once again fall into Christian hands; and four months after the pipe-line crossed the frontier at Rafa, Jerusalem was captured by Allenby,



whose name when written in Arabic is النبي (the Prophet).

The various proclamations and orders to the inhabitants of Sinai and Palestine that were issued during the advance were signed by a name which, when translated into Arabic, was read by every Arab as El Nebi, the Prophet, and it was firmly believed by the great mass of the population that Allenby was indeed a new prophet, though albeit a rather stern and terrifying one.

Another quaint belief that persisted among the Indian troops was that the war would end when Damas (Damascus) was captured. When this belief first spread the troops were on the Canal, and there was as much prospect of taking Damascus as Berlin—in fact, in those days though we confidently believed we should win the war in the end, there was not the slightest reason why we should ever advance as far east as Damascus—and yet the prophecy came true ; as a month after the fall of Damascus the war ended.

In the many books written on the Sinai and Palestine campaigns only casual reference has been made to the work performed by the two Egyptian Corps—*i.e.*, the Camel Transport Corps and the Egyptian Labour Corps. The whole of the camel transport of the campaign was carried out by the former force, whilst the pipe-line and railway were constructed by the Labour Corps, supervised by railway officials from the Egyptian State Railways ; and no praise can be too high for the wonderful work performed by these two organisations. The Camel Transport Corps attracted a very good class

of fellah and Nile Valley Arab ; and their efficiency in keeping in touch with the fighting patrols was the admiration of the whole force. They were frequently under fire and occasionally suffered severe casualties from shells and aerial bombs, yet, though a quite undisciplined and irregular force, they carried on stolidly ; and much of the success of the campaign was due to the magnificent service rendered by these untiring camel-men.

The Egyptian Labour Corps, recruited from the fellaheen of the Nile Valley, who are without question the hardest-working race in the world, put in a cheerful ten-hour day of unremitting toil whatever the weather, and were responsible solely for the marvellous rapidity with which the railway and pipeline kept touch with the advancing troops. They commanded the respectful and grudging admiration of the British troops ; and I overheard a cockney soldier, who was watching a gang of 500 Egyptians running with baskets of earth in the construction of an embankment, suck his teeth and remark reluctantly : “ Yus, and what they want is a few Trade Unions—that’d slow ’em up a bit.”

Murray’s advance troops reached El Arish on 20th December 1916, and occupied the town without fighting, as the enemy had withdrawn eastwards to Rafa and southwards to Magdaba, which post was connected with Auja, the advanced base, by a metalled road and Deceauville line. Between Auja and Magdaba the Turks had constructed a series of watering stations from wells dug in the Wadi El Arish, and any further advance from El Arish would be dangerous so long as Magdaba, twenty

miles away on the flank, remained in the hands of the enemy. A mounted and camel force was therefore despatched from El Arish on the 22nd December, and attacked Magdaba at dawn the following day. The position was not a naturally strong one, but the Turks had constructed a series of redoubts and held out till the late afternoon, when a party of Australian Light Horse, who had made a flank movement round the west of the post, galloped in from the south, and the Turks then put up the white flag. Four guns and 1,282 men were captured, whilst the bodies of 97 men were buried. The British losses were 22 killed and 124 wounded. The Turkish troops occupying the posts along the Wadi El Arish at Abu Augeila, Aulad Ali and Ruafa, then withdrew to Auja, and the right flank was clear of the enemy.

This left a small post of some 2,000 men, who were occupying a strong post at Rafa just within the Palestine-Sinai frontier. On January 8th a force consisting of the Australian Light Horse, New Zealand M.I., Yeomanry, and Imperial Camel Corps, surrounded the Turkish position, and a stern little fight lasting the whole day took place. The Turkish redoubts were constructed on lofty sand dunes commanding a plain absolutely devoid of cover, and the losses of the British were heavy considering the force engaged. Towards evening a report of Turkish reinforcements marching from Khan Yunis was received, and orders were about to be issued to break off the attack when a bayonet charge by the New Zealanders carried the most important redoubt and a general assault then carried the remainder just as darkness fell. The Turks lost a battery of



guns, 1,635 prisoners, and about 200 killed; whilst the British casualties were 71 killed and 415 wounded.

With the Battle of Rafa the Near East campaign, so far as Sinai was concerned, was ended; and El Arish became an advanced base with an enormous railway siding, a musketry and bombing school, two hospitals, and a pile-driven quay for the landing of stores from the sea. Kantara, as the base, became a military city covering eight square miles of the desert—every branch of the army was represented there, as it contained hospitals with eye, dental and skin specialists, ordnance stores, Army Service Corps, Railway and Mechanical Transport workshops, reinforcement camps, rest camps for every Division, Y.M.C.A. huts, a cinema, a military prison, and a huge prisoners of war camp. When Kantara finally fell from its high estate as a military metropolis in the year 1922, and shrank to its present proportions—*i.e.*, a mark on the desert,—a few officers who had found jobs at Kantara in 1914, and had remained there ever since, crawled out from the ruins to meet demobilisation and return to civil life. They had seen the rise and fall of Kantara—they had seen Kantara first as a palm tree and a mud hut, they had watched its growth into the biggest military city the world has ever known, and they had seen it disintegrate once more to a palm tree considerably the worse for four years of war, a mud hut and a mass of ruins—"sic transit gloria mundi."



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE FORTY YEARS' WANDERINGS.

"And they departed from before Pi-hahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness."—NUMBERS xxxiii. 8.

THERE is no event in the Old Testament about which there has been so much contention, and so many conflicting views, as the flight of the Israelites from Egypt and the site of their subsequent wanderings in Sinai. The difficulty in arriving at a solution is increased by the fact that it is a story concerning two nations; but whilst the Israelitish scribes deal with it as an epoch-making episode, the Egyptian records, which, considering the lapse of time, are fairly complete, make practically no mention of the presence of the Israelites in Egypt except as foreign labourers, and their flight from the country is completely ignored.

The exodus of the Israelites was probably a far more important matter in the eyes of the Israelites themselves than in those of the Egyptians. Egypt in those days was a great nation, and it is most unlikely that she viewed the emigration of a party of discontented foreigners as a vital blow to her prestige—as we are led to believe from the Book of Exodus. One may safely assume that the Government of that day was considerably annoyed at their

flight, and took steps to bring them back ; but there is no record of any Egyptian Pharaoh having lost his life by drowning during this period ; so that if the king himself did accompany the punitive army he was certainly not one of the casualties.

The majority of the historians who have endeavoured to solve the mystery of the exact site of the wanderings, and loss of the Egyptian host, have based their views on the documentary or inscriptional evidence available, rather than on the geographical condition of Sinai and its routes. It has been accepted generally by the majority of historians that the Israelites, prior to their flight, were settled in the Zagazig-Wadi-Tumilat area west of Ismailieh. The Israelites at that time were a nomad tribe and after Joseph's arrival in Egypt began to filter in from the desert areas—in the same way that Arab tribes do to-day—to a country where grazing and desert cultivation offered better opportunities for existence. Like all Arabs they had a very marked antipathy to Government interference, and so long as they were left alone to live their own lives in the Land of Goschen all was well. As civilisation and irrigation increased in Egypt, during one of her many periods of prosperity the Government of the day decided that the nomad Israelites should no longer be exempt from all taxation and service, but should do their share in supplying labour and conscripts and in the payment of taxes. The *corvée* or compulsory labour law of Egypt was then in force, as it is at the present time, and the application of it to the Arab tribes that live on the fringe of the cultivation in Egypt to-day would arouse quite as

much antagonism as it did in the case of the Israelites.

One of the tasks set the Israelites was the provision of bricks for granaries, and not only did they have to supply the labour but the materials also. One of the constituents of the mud brick is *tibn* or chopped straw, which forms also the principal item of fodder for all animals in Egypt. Apparently the Israelites were unable to find sufficient *tibn* without robbing their animals, and were forced to collect grass and herbage, with the result that the bricks were unsatisfactory. Their hardships assumed gigantic proportions in their eyes, as is the case with all Arabs and nomads if called upon to render public service, however slight, and the decision to escape from their serfdom was made even though it meant exchanging the more or less fruitful land of Goschen for the wilderness of Sinai.

In deciding the line of the Israelitish flight theologians have paid particular attention to the site of Succouth or Pithom. For some time Succouth was thought to be about twenty miles south-west of Port Said, and if this contention was correct it was considered that the Israelitish flight might have been into the north of Sinai, and the disaster to the Egyptian host as having occurred in Lake Timsah. More recently, however, Pithom or Succouth has been identified with Tel El Mashkuta, about twenty miles west-south-west of Ismailieh, or from twenty-five to thirty miles south of the site originally accepted. This is considered as having definitely exploded the Northern Sinai and Lake Timsah theory, but it is difficult to understand how a differ-





residence and travelling in the Peninsula, combined with a careful perusal of the reference Bible so far as Exodus and Numbers are concerned.

A large number of theologians have visited Sinai with the object of following the route taken by Moses and his people, but, having only a short time at their disposal, they have been unable to see any part of Sinai except the route that has been accepted for the last seventeen hundred years. This route passes from Egypt proper into Sinai in the vicinity of Suez, and, heading due south into the wild mountainous area at the apex of the Peninsula, leads out into the land of Edom in the neighbourhood of Akaba. Places have been pointed out to such travellers as Marah, Elim and the Holy Mount, which they have been forced to accept in lieu of other evidence and for lack of time in which to study the Peninsula as a whole; and the crossing of the sea and engulfing of the Egyptian host is commonly supposed to have happened either at the head of the Gulf of Suez or in the Great Bitter Lake, which in those days might possibly have been connected with the sea. Those who like a more or less feasible explanation of the miracles of the Old Testament have believed that the Egyptian Army were caught on one of the big sandy flats that still exist at Suez, and that a flowing tide with a strong east wind caused the disaster, in much the same way as King John's army was destroyed in the Wash; and others believe that the sea actually opened up, forming a pathway for the Israelites, but rolling back and utterly engulfing the Egyptian host. It is interesting to note that Mohammedans believe

that the disaster occurred on the opposite side of Sinai in the Gulf of Akaba, though what the Egyptian Army were doing there remains a mystery.

Till quite recent years, therefore, the theory has been universally accepted that Moses and his host, having crossed the Gulf of Suez in the vicinity of Suez, journeyed southwards *via* the Wadi Feiran to Gebel Mousa (Mount Moses), and having received the laws, remained in this barren mountainous region, with occasional visits to Kadish Barnea in the north, until they crossed over into Edom to seize Palestine. There is, however, a considerable number of very convincing reasons for assuming that, except for parties grazing flocks, the Israelites never went to Southern Sinai.

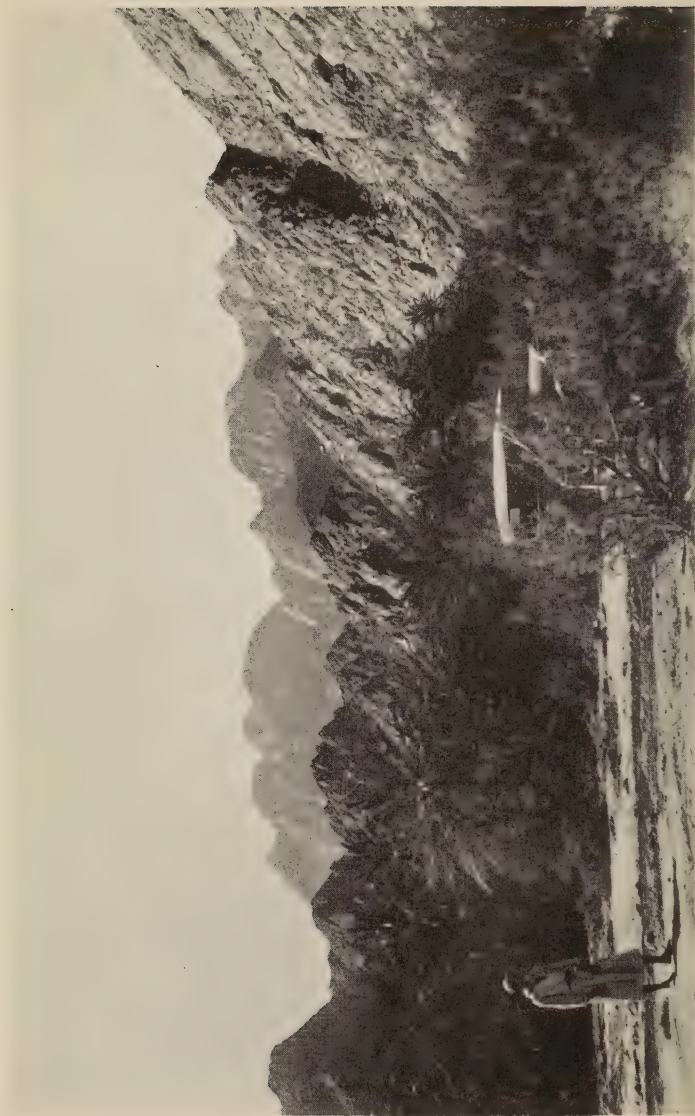
A short description of Sinai may help one to grasp the very inhospitable country in which the Israelites spent forty years. It is a triangular peninsula 260 miles long, 150 miles wide at the north, and tapering to a point in the south. At the present time it may be geologically divided into three parts: first, a sandy belt of country some fifteen miles deep, stretching from the Mediterranean shore southwards; second, a high gravel and limestone plateau intersected by wide wadis or dry torrent beds, which stretches from the sand belt to a point some 150 miles southwards; and thirdly, a tumbled mass of granite mountains rising to 8000 feet which forms the apex of the Peninsula. The coastal sandy belt dies away a few miles east of El Arish, giving place to a sandy loam which yields excellent crops. There is every reason to believe, from the encroachment of sand that has taken

place during the last twenty years, that a great part of this sandy belt is of recent origin, and that at the time of the exodus all the coastal area was capable of producing corn crops.

There used to be a more or less generally accepted idea that Moses and the host wandered around Sinai for forty years, existing solely on manna and quails; but a study of the Book of Exodus will disclose the fact that at all sacrifices and ceremonies bread, flour, meat and other commodities were plentiful, and it is safe to assume that the manna was eaten only during their first few months in Sinai before they had settled down to cultivate the land, and possibly during periods of famine. The presence of flour and oil, and animals such as oxen, goats, sheep and donkeys, proves that they must have cultivated the land very extensively. In other words, the Israelites during their forty years' sojourn must have lived very much the same sort of life as is lived by the inhabitants of Sinai to-day, taking full advantage of those areas where the soil is suitable for corn crops, exploiting the date palm and using the mountainous areas for the grazing of goats and sheep. They no doubt dispossessed the existing inhabitants of the land—*i.e.*, the Amalekites, who were probably a nomad Arab tribe very similar to the Azazma who at present occupy the south-eastern corner of the triangle of good land. The battle with the Amalekites is described in Exodus, chapter xvii., verses 8-16, as taking place at Rephidim. After this engagement we may presume that the Amalekites accepted defeat and had perforce to allow the Israelites to







Gebel Serbal from the Wadi Feiran, at one time considered the  
Mountain of the Law.

occupy their area. This is an Arab situation that occurs to-day in Arabia, and, until Governments took an interest in Arab movements, in Egypt and Palestine also. The Midianites were probably the forbears of the existing Lehewat tribe occupying the area south of the Dead Sea and parts of south-east Sinai. Moses having married a daughter of Jethro, the paramount sheikh, and the Israelites not desiring their territory, they lived on friendly terms with the tribe; and it was at Jethro's suggestion that Moses framed his laws and tribal organisation which are to all intents and purposes the ordinance pertaining in the Arab world to-day.

The reasons for assuming that the Israelites never visited Southern Sinai but confined their sojourn to the north are as follows :—

First, before one accepts a new theory it is necessary to examine the discarded one and the evidence in its favour. The only evidence in favour of Southern Sinai and Mount Moses is tradition. It should be borne in mind, however, that over fifteen hundred years had elapsed since the exodus before the earliest Christian pilgrims set out to locate the site of the Holy Mount, and that until 300 A.D. a totally different mountain—*i.e.*, Gebel Serbal, was accepted as the site. Tradition is never particularly reliable, and with a nomad Arab population locations and facts are apt to become extremely vague after a time, as many travellers have learned to their cost. The pilgrims of old had probably very little to guide them beyond the fact that the Mountain of the Law was an exceedingly high and impressive one—but height

and impressiveness are very largely a matter of comparison. Mount Moses is certainly a most impressive mass of granite, and 8000 feet is no mean height, but in Northern Sinai there are mountains 2000 feet high rising from a flat plain which are quite as impressive when the surrounding country is taken into consideration.

The second point is that Southern Sinai is a tumbled mass of pure granite, and that even if one allows for a considerably heavier rainfall than it receives to-day, it could never by any flight of the imagination have supported the vast herds of oxen sheep, goats, &c., that accompanied the host, without taking into consideration the question of corn. The only foodstuff produced in Southern Sinai is dates and a few fruits such as pears, almonds, &c., which are grown in some of the deep wadis in a soil composed of disintegrated granite, and there are probably not fifty acres in the whole area capable of producing corn. There is one part only of Sinai where corn can be cultivated in any quantity, and this is in the triangle El Arish-Rafa-Kosseima. In the days of Moses, when the frontiers were not clearly defined, there is no doubt that the wilderness of Sinai extended as far as Asluj in Palestine. In this area to-day first-class crops of barley and wheat are produced, and it is evident from the traces of stone terracing in all the wide wadis that this area was in the past very much more extensively cultivated than it is to-day, and, moreover, was cultivated by a race who possessed a certain amount of civilisation. There can be no doubt, therefore,



that the sojourning place of the host was in that triangle. It is evident from a study of Exodus and Numbers that the various tribes of the Israelites differed in their characteristics—some tribes were religious teachers, others craftsmen, &c., and therefore one may assume that the cultivators and craftsmen of the host dwelt in this more or less civilised area, whilst the herdsmen moved about Southern and Central Sinai in search of grazing.

Against this theory it may be argued that the size of the host was such that it would be impossible for this small area to support the three million souls (the figure that Numbers, chapter i., indicates) who followed Moses out of Egypt. After the Giving of the Law Moses numbered the fighting men of the tribes, counting every man over twenty years of age was who fit to take the field, and the total came to 603,550. Allowing to every fighting man a wife, two children and an aged parent, which is a very modest estimate for an oriental race, one arrives at the stupendous figure of three million. The absolute impossibility of moving a host of this dimension out of Egypt and supporting them in the desert has long been apparent to all students of the wanderings, and Sir Flinders Petrie has a most feasible and ingenious explanation of how the misconception occurred. The Hebrew word for thousand, *alaf*, may also mean family or section, and is somewhat similar to the Arab word *aila*, which is used in the same sense. Numbers i. verse 21: "Those that were numbered of them, *even* of the tribe of Reuben, *were* forty and six thousand and five hun-



dred." And so on. With 'thousand' taken to mean 'family,' one gets the following result :—

Tribe of Reuben	46 families	500 fighting men—not 46,500.
„ Simeon	59 „	300 „
„ Gad	45 „	650 „
„ Judah	74 „	600 „
„ Issachar	54 „	400 „
„ Zebulun	57 „	400 „
„ Ephraim	40 „	500 „
„ Manasseh	32 „	200 „
„ Benjamin	35 „	400 „
„ Dan	62 „	700 „
„ Asher	41 „	500 „
„ Naphtali	53 „	400 „

It will be seen that in most cases a large number of families means a proportionately large number of fighting men—*i.e.*, Judah 74 families, 600 men, and Dan 62 families, 700 men. There are some exceptions to the rule, but on the whole the theory holds good. If one allows four dependants to each fighting man, one arrives at the moderate figure of twenty-seven thousand, which is a host that could be transported without much difficulty and which could quite easily support itself in the cultivable part of Northern Sinai, it being, in fact, the approximate number of inhabitants in that area to-day. The argument that the numbers must have been less than thirty thousand is proved by the fact that Moses acted as judge and mediator in every dispute, and there were only two midwives to the whole host.

There are frequent references to Kadish Barnea in Exodus and Numbers, and Kadish Barnea has been located as the existing Ain Kadeis on the

Palestine frontier south of Kosseima. Ain Kadeis, however, is an insignificant spring, and it is more probable that Kadish Barnea is the present Ain Gedeirat, five miles to the north, where there is a strong little stream that flows through the valley for a distance of a mile and a half. Here there are traces of extensive cultivation and irrigation, and amongst other things a very fine stone reservoir, 25 yards by 25 and 9 feet in depth. The reservoir is of great antiquity, and nothing has so far been found in the wadi that affords any definite clues as to the identity of its builders. From the nature of the construction it is obvious the work is not Roman, and it is just possible that the Israelites themselves may have made it.

The third point against Southern Sinai being the site of the wanderings is the manna. The manna has been accepted by most scientists as being the deposit left by a small insect that feeds upon the tamarisk tree at certain seasons of the year. The small white grains the size of a coriander seed are still to be found in large quantities under the tamarisk bushes during the spring. It is not exactly an appetising form of diet, but would no doubt serve to keep body and soul together. In Southern Sinai there are very few tamarisks to be found, but on the Mediterranean coast they are plentiful, and before the sand-dunes invaded this area it is obvious, from the stumps of semi-fossilised trees, that there was a veritable forestal belt of tamarisk which would have supplied sufficient manna for the Israelites.

The fourth and most convincing argument concerns the quails. On two separate occasions—once

after leaving Elim and once considerably later at Kibroth-Hattavah—the Israelites fed on the quails that came in from the sea in a cloud and settled near the camp. This is a sight that may be seen to-day at almost any part of the Mediterranean coast during the autumn migration. In the months of September and October, shortly after dawn on almost any day, one may see a cloud of quail coming in from the sea so completely exhausted that they pitch on the sea-shore and stagger into the nearest scrub for cover. It is quite easy when the birds are in this condition to catch them by hand, and in a year when the migration is good it would be quite possible for a host as numerous as the Israelites to eat their fill, and it is also quite possible—the birds being extremely fat and oily—for a surfeit to cause gastric trouble, which apparently happened at Kibroth-Hattavah. All this could quite easily happen to-day in North Sinai, but not in the south, where the quail is never seen; the migrating swarms of quail pitch on the Mediterranean shores and nowhere else. This in itself is sufficient argument to prove that the wanderings must of necessity have been in the north and not the south.

Another point against Southern Sinai is the fact that, though the Egyptians of those days ignored Northern Sinai, as is proved by the complete absence of any temples or buildings of any kind, they were very considerably interested in Southern Sinai, where they had turquoise and copper mines, and for its pearls, peridots and other semi-precious stones. There are the remains of at least ten mines in different parts of the apex of the Peninsula, and

at Serabit el Khadim there is a temple and the ruins of army barracks, the date of which proves that at the time of the exodus Southern Sinai was garrisoned by Egyptian troops to protect the mines.

Moses was well acquainted with Sinai before he led the Israelites there, as he had visited the country and, moreover, had married the daughter of a Sinai or Trans-Jordan Arab, Jethro. It is most unlikely that he would have taken the Israelites into a country garrisoned by his enemies. Incidentally, the barracks at Serabit el Khadim are only a matter of fifty miles from Mount Moses itself, and the Israelites were, according to the Book of Numbers, encamped at the foot of Mount Moses for over a year—*i.e.*, within striking distance of Egyptian troops.

If one searches for a suitable mountain in Northern Sinai for the site of the law-giving, Gebel Hellal, thirty miles south of El Arish, at once suggests itself. It is a most imposing limestone massif over 2000 feet high and standing up in the midst of a vast alluvial plain, and though very much smaller than Mount Moses it is far more impressive, as it stands by itself, whereas Mount Moses is only one of some ten peaks of similar size in an area of twenty square miles, and is neither the highest nor the grandest of the range.

The name Gebel Hellal is of peculiar significance, as the Arabic word 'hellal' means 'lawful,' and is generally used in connection with the slaughtering of animals—namely, if an animal is correctly killed by having its throat cut it is deemed 'hellal.' As the Mountain of Moses is, firstly, connected with



the giving of the law, and secondly with many sacrifices of animals killed in the Jewish manner, which incidentally coincides with that of the Moham-medan, the name Hellal suggests that this mountain may very possibly be the actual site of the law-giving. In Egypt and Palestine the majority of place-names have a meaning. For instance, Luxor is a corruption of El Aqsar—the Forts ; Bir Sheba means the Seventh Well ; Tel-el-kebir means the Big Hill, &c., &c., and tradition always has an explanation of the meaning, but in the case of Hellal the local Arabs have no explanation. They tell you it is the place of lawfully slaughtered animals, but on being asked when animals were slaughtered they can only say, “ Wallahi ; min arif ? ” “ By God, who knows ? ”

Whilst on the topic of names it is interesting to note that in the road report of the Israelites' wanderings enumerated in chapter xxxiii. of Numbers, when the various camping-grounds are mentioned in order, there is only one place in Southern Sinai that resembles any of the places in this list of camping-grounds. This is the Wadi Feiran, which is supposed to be the wilderness of Paran where the Amalekites were smitten. In Northern Sinai, however, there are to-day a large number of names that mean nothing in Arabic, and which closely resemble places mentioned in Exodus. They are : Kadeis, which has already been accepted as Kadish Barnea ; Hazira, which may be Hazeroth ; Hariedin, which resembles Haradna ; Libni, which may be Libnah ; Rissan Aneiza—Rissah ; Arish—Alush, &c., &c., and all these places are situated in the triangle

of cultivated land within easy reach of Gebel Hellal.

On reading the wanderings, mention is found of the wilderness of Sinai, desert of Sinai, wilderness of Shur, wilderness of Paran, &c. These have been studied most carefully, and it is to be regretted that it is impossible to arrive at any conclusion as to where the Israelites imagined that these various wildernesses began and ended. The books of Exodus and Numbers are both vastly interesting, and marvellous examples of the literature of those days ; but as a convincing road report they leave very much to be desired. It is absolutely impossible to map out correctly the route the Israelites took, and any attempt to do so leaves one completely fogged. The most one can do is more or less to trace these wanderings as far as the triangle El Arish-Rafa-Kosseima.

Twice, however, mention is made of the Red Sea ; once as the site of the engulfing of the Egyptian Army, and once when the Israelites returned to halt there after leaving Elim—this being the occasion when the first cloud of quail descended on the camp. It is the definite mention of the Red Sea that has always led people to suppose that, *ipso facto*, the destruction of the army must have happened near Suez, and the wanderings must have taken place in the south. But in the Hebrew script Red Sea is translated from the Hebrew words ' Yam Suf,' and the correct translation of Yam Suf is not Red Sea but Sea of Reeds. There are no reeds whatsoever in the Red Sea, and therefore not the slightest reason to connect Yam Suf with the Gulf of Suez

or any other part of the Red Sea. The only place that in any way suggests a sea of reeds is the vast Bardawil Lake on the Mediterranean coast between Port Said and El Arish. On certain parts of the shores of this lake there are big areas of rushes, and if we can accept Lake Bardawil as the Yam Suf of the Hebrew script, the wanderings of the Israelites, the quail and manna episodes, the law-giving, and even the engulfing of the Egyptian host fit into each other like the parts of a jig-saw puzzle.

As has been mentioned before, there is a certain number of people who like to accept the miracles of the Old Testament in simple faith, and there are others whose matter-of-fact nature causes them to seek for a plausible explanation. They see the Israelites as a fanatical race steeped in superstition and imbued with the idea that they were the chosen people of the Lord, who attributed to the direct intervention of the Almighty practically every occurrence that to their ignorant minds could not be explained; and they very excusably ask for a matter-of-fact interpretation of all the miracles that happened to the Israelites.

The striking of the rock at Rephidim by Moses and the gushing forth of the water sounds like a veritable miracle, but the writer has actually seen it happen. Some of the Sinai Camel Corps had halted in a wadi and were digging in the loose gravel accumulated at one of the rocky sides to obtain water that was slowly trickling through the limestone rock. The men were working slowly, and the Bash Shawish, the Colour-Sergeant, said, "Give it to me," and seizing a shovel from one of the men he



began to dig with great vigour, which is the way with N.C.O.'s the world over when they wish to show their men what they can do, and have, incidentally, no intention of carrying on for more than two minutes. One of his lusty blows hit the rock, when the polished hard face that forms on weathered limestone cracked and fell away, exposing the soft porous rock beneath, and out of the porous rock came a great gush of clear water. It is regrettable that these Sudanese Camel Corps, who are well up in the doings of all the prophets and who are not particularly devout, hailed their N.C.O. with shouts of "What ho, the Prophet Moses!" This is a very feasible explanation of what happened when Moses struck the rock at Rephidim, and, what is more, Moses—being an extraordinarily knowledgable man—had probably a very shrewd idea that something of the sort would happen.

The theory that the site of the wanderings of the Israelites was in the north of Sinai and not the south is not by any means a new one, as it has been accepted by a considerable number of theologians for many years, though incidentally a far greater number dispute this view. All that has been attempted so far is to confirm the theory in the light of nine years' travels in Sinai, and to bring fresh evidence, based on a special knowledge of the country, to support these conclusions. The really puzzling part of the exodus is the drowning of Pharaoh's host—how it took place and where. The theory that a particularly low tide—helped by the strong east wind—drove back the sea from the mud-flats by Suez, leaving them dry for the Israelites to cross, is diffi-



cult to understand, as an east wind would have no effect on the sea in this part. The other theory, that the disaster occurred in the Great or Little Bitter Lake, is also difficult to understand, as high winds here do not have the effect of displacing the water to any marked extent. The strongest gale might lower the water on the windward side a few inches, but no great expanse of sand or mud would be left exposed. On the Mediterranean coast, however, on the suggested route of the Israelites, there is the vast Bardawil Lake, forty-five miles long and thirteen miles wide, that provides a very credible explanation of the occurrence.

The Bardawil Lake has, as has already been explained, large masses of rushes and reeds on the southern shore, and therefore may very possibly be the Yam Suf—the sea of reeds, not the Red Sea, in which the Egyptians were engulfed. The name, therefore, is in its favour. It is really an enormous clay pan about six to ten feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea, and separated from the sea the whole length by a very narrow strip of sand which varies from one to three hundred yards in width. At the present moment the lake is used as a mullet fishery, and is kept filled with sea-water by cutting channels through the sandbank, but the normal condition of the lake is a vast salt-encrusted pan. During the war, when Sinai was invaded by the Turks, the fishing in the lake was stopped, and it soon returned to its habitual state—the channels connecting it with the sea silted up and the lake very quickly dried, leaving a salt clay surface which would not support a car, though many unwary





View from the air of the narrow strip of sand separating the Pardawil Lake  
from the Mediterranean.

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drivers thought it would. During gales the sea broke through from time to time and flooded the lake, but the breaks silted up and in a few months it was dry again. So here we have a narrow sandy pathway along the sand-strip which leads directly to the cultivable part of Northern Sinai by El Arish, and which is still one of the main tracks to El Arish and Palestine.

In the days of the exodus the Pelusiatic branch of the Nile flowed through what is now Kantara into the sea at Mohammediyah. Mohammediyah is now nothing but a name, but it was the old port of Gercha, and the stone quays may still be seen on the seashore, while a little way inland, and to the west, are the ruins of the city of Pelusium. It was here, incidentally, that the Mohammedans first met the Romans, and Pelusium was the first city in Egypt to fall.

The flight of the Israelites from Egypt may therefore be considered as having started when they crossed the Pelusiatic branch of the Nile and struck into the desert, and their objective was obviously the rich lands of Southern Palestine.

Having crossed the Pelusiatic branch, Moses had to decide whether he would take the route on which the present railway runs *via* Romani and Bir-el-Abd, or the track that lies along the sea-shore—both are equally used by camel men to-day. It is possible that in those days the main track lay *via* Romani, owing to the existence of wells. At the present time the route is covered with difficult sand-dunes, but as the sand is believed to be of more or less recent origin it is quite probable that heretofore it was a



practical highway. Moses very possibly selected the route along the sea-shore as being farther away from the Egyptians, and thus providing him with a few extra valuable hours in his flight. Exodus, chapter xiii., verses 17 and 18, as follows:—

17. "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not *through* the way of the land of the Philistines, although that *was* near; for God said, 'Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.'

18. "But God led the people about, *through* the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt."

rather lends colour to this view. It is stated in Exodus that the Israelites were overtaken by the Egyptians when encamping by the sea at Pi-Hairoth before Baal Zephon, which is between Migdol and the sea. Pi-Hairoth may possibly be Mohammediyah itself or Galss, which is twenty-five miles farther eastward on the causeway of sand between the Bardawil Lake and the sea. The exact site matters little; the point is that the Egyptian Army, setting out from Memphis, or possibly from a military station in the vicinity of Zagazig, were trying to overtake the Israelites, and as the Israelites were fleeing along the coast-line the obvious thing to do would be to take a short-cut and try to head them off. The short-cut would take them through Kantara *via* Katia to the southern side of Lake Bardawil, which at this spot is narrow. The Bardawil was then in its normal state—namely, a dry clay pan. It was the spring of the year, April, and April weather in Egypt is distinctly unsettled. In Exodus,

chapter xiii., it is said that a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night accompanied the host. Sir Hanbury Brown, in his book 'The Land of Goschen and Exodus,' explains this as being the torches carried by caravans when crossing the desert to mark the route for stragglers—the smoke showing for miles in the clear desert air, and at night the reflection from the torches on the cloud of smoke giving the appearance of a column of fire. This is a very feasible explanation, but a preferable view is that the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire were something that to the Israelites suggested the hand of God and not the hand of man.

In Sinai when heavy weather is impending there is a most remarkable cloud formation—namely, a huge column of cumulus, black in the centre with hard white edges. This column, which begins at the sky-line and is most impressive, extends to the zenith, constantly emitting lightning, and at night is an intermittent blaze of fire. This cloud was coming in from the eastward, as it has done this year or for that matter every year since I have been in Sinai, and to the superstitious Israelites no doubt appeared to be a sign from the Almighty to show them the way. It also proved their salvation, as it heralded the heavy weather that accounted for the engulfing of the host.

The Egyptians started to cut across the clay pan to head off the Israelites, and were almost immediately in difficulties. In Exodus, chapter xiv., verse 24: "And it came to pass that in the morning watch the Lord looked into the host of Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and troubled the

host of the Egyptians." This does not fit in at all with the old-fashioned idea that the sea opened up to make a pathway for the Israelites and rolled back on the Egyptians. This would take a matter of minutes only, and the verse quoted rather suggests an army of chariots and horsemen who have got into the middle of a clay pan that is too soft to support them, and that their difficulties have been greatly increased by a downpour of rain for which the pillar of cloud was responsible.

Exodus, chapter xiv., verse 20, also mentions that the cloud was between the Israelites and the Egyptians, and that it was white and shining on the Israelites' side and dark on the Egyptians'. This is a very good description of a violent cloud-burst such as is peculiar to the Sinai desert. These cloud-bursts, which are extraordinarily local, usually deluge with an enormous amount of water a small area about four miles square, and the cloud which brings this torrent of rain is always intensely black, but outside the area of its scope the sun shining on the falling rain makes it appear as a shimmering silver curtain.

Verse 25 says :

"And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily : so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel ; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians."

There is no mention so far of the sea having returned, and yet already the Egyptians have obviously got the whole army bogged, with the wheels driving heavily and some of them being torn off their axles.



The next three verses read :

“ And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

“ And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared ; and the Egyptians fled against it ; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

“ And the waters returned and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them ; there remained not so much as one of them.”

It is submitted that the explanation of this is simple. The strong east wind which causes a very heavy sea on the coast of Sinai—a much bigger one incidentally than a northerly or north-westerly gale—had caused the waves to break through the causeway of sand at six or seven different places—an incident that occurs two or three times every year—and the whole Bardawil was very shortly flooded to a depth of five or six feet. It is not suggested that the water came down like an avalanche, as the flooding of this vast area takes time, and it all depends upon the size and number of the channels made in the sand causeway whether the lake fills rapidly or not ; but it may be taken for granted that this was an exceptional occurrence and that the flooding was rapid. In any case, whether the lake took a day or a week to fill the fate of the Egyptians was sealed. They were hopelessly bogged to start with, and, with several feet of sea water to contend with as well as the mud, it is quite conceivable that every chariot and horse was lost, and that possibly only a few saved themselves by swimming. This is



a catastrophe that could happen to-day if an army were foolish enough to try and cross the clay pan with bad weather in the offing.

Verse 29 says :

“ But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea ; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.”

This is precisely the impression one gets if one walks along the narrow strip of sand that separates the Mediterranean from Lake Bardawil. The southern shore of the lake is out of sight, and one has the illusion of walking along a very narrow highway with the sea on either side—a most impressive and awe-inspiring feeling. One can easily imagine the superstitious Israelites thinking that the pathway had been specially opened up for them by God.

In the next chapter of Exodus Moses sings his song of triumph, and in the circumstances one must excuse a little poetic licence when he speaks of the flood standing upright in a heap. Despite the rather high-flown expressions he, however, reiterates the statement that the earth swallowed the Egyptians as well as the water, and confirms the impression that they were bogged. In any case, the song of Moses was written some seven centuries later and may be no more correct than the remark attributed to Wellington that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton—or the famous “ Up, Guards, and at ’em ! ” fable.

Immediately after the escape from the Egyptian Army, the Israelites came to Marah, where the water was bitter. They probably turned southwards in

search of water directly they reached the eastern end of the lake and found the wells at Mazar, which are undoubtedly bitter. The water, incidentally, is so bad it cannot be used on the engines of the Palestine Railway.

From Marah they struck northwards again and camped at Elim by the sea, which is probably the present Masaid. Here they found plenty of water and scanty palm-trees, which aptly describes Masaid. Here also the shortage of food became acute, and they were miraculously saved firstly by the manna and secondly by the quail.

At Masaid, and to the eastwards now, there are many huge tamarisk-trees of great age, and buried in the sand are the trunks of what must have been in the past almost a forest. It is also the best spot on the Mediterranean coast for quail.

Exodus, chapter xvi., verse 13, merely states :

“And it came to pass that at even the quail came up and covered the camp; and in the morning the dew lay round about the host,”

from which one gathers that the quail were not particularly numerous, which fits in with the April return migration, when the quail, flying northward across the desert, rest for a day on the coast before crossing the Mediterranean. This migration is not nearly so marked as the outward migration which takes place in September and October. Numbers, chapter xi., verses 31, 32 and 33, says :

31. “And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's

journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.

32. "And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails; he that gathered least gathered ten homers; and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

33. "And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague."

This happened much later—*i.e.*, after the giving of the law, and was no doubt the autumn migration when the birds arrive in clouds and are incidentally extraordinarily fat, which would account for the distressing outbreak of acute gastritis from which apparently the host suffered. The statement that they were two cubits high upon the face of the earth cannot, of course, be taken literally, as forty miles of quails three feet deep is ludicrous. The explanation would appear to be simple—*i.e.*, that they flew at the height of two cubits from the ground—the normal height at which a tired quail flies—so that it was comparatively easy to knock them down with palm branches.

Beyond this point no attempt to trace the wanderings in detail is made, as most of the name-places have disappeared, and the account as rendered in Exodus is so extremely vague it is impossible to arrive at any definite conclusion. There are, however, only twenty-seven camping-places mentioned in Numbers, and the places mentioned earlier in the article, which resemble the names of places now existing, are not consecutive, but appear at all stages of the wanderings. The contention there-

fore is that, finding the triangle of El Arish-Rafa-Kosseima the only part of Sinai in which a host of this size could exist, the Israelites remained there till such time as they were strong enough to attempt to conquer Palestine, and that the places mentioned are not the movements of the whole host, but merely the sites of various camps at which Moses, as paramount chief, accompanied by the Ark and the priests, had his headquarters.



## CHAPTER X.

## SMUGGLING AND TRACKING.

"Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."  
—ST JOHN iii. 19.

IT is only during recent years that the peoples of Europe and the United States have developed a taste for narcotics, thereby compelling their respective Governments to take preventive measures; but Egypt has been grappling with the problem for a very considerable period. The popular drug of the Egyptian fellah is hashish, a hemp product; and, though cocaine and heroin have found a considerable measure of favour in the big towns of late, hashish still finds a ready market in all the villages. Compared with cocaine and heroin, hashish may be regarded as a mild form of narcotic, but constant use leads to a weakening of the moral fibre, loss of energy and ultimately, in many cases, to insanity.

The drug is produced in Syria, Anatolia and Greece, and is run into Egypt by a variety of routes and methods, the choice depending upon the comparative activities of the various forces arrayed against the contrabandists. Owing to the huge profits made by hashish smugglers, the trade attracts men of marked intelligence, so that the coast-guards and police have no easy task in their efforts to squash it. Roughly speaking, there are three

methods employed in getting hashish into Egypt—*i.e.*, running a cargo by steamer and sailing-vessel and landing it on the coast, or handing it over to fishing-vessels; carrying it by camel across the Sinai or the Eastern Deserts; and sending a consignment by cargo-steamer packed up with some other commodity such as rice, currants, &c., in the hope that the Customs officials will make only a cursory examination of what is obviously a lawful import. It is clear that the Customs cannot open some hundreds of packing-cases and sacks, and the hashish is so carefully hidden that a thorough examination of every case or sack would be necessary in order to detect it. Not long ago a very large consignment of olive-oil in four-gallon tins was closely examined, and fastened to the bottom of each tin was a small water-tight case containing a quantity of hashish. On another occasion six millstones were exported from Turkey to Egypt, but whereas the millstones actually used in mills are made of a hard amalgam, these were constructed of cement, and were not intended to be used for the purpose for which they were apparently made. It was hoped, however, that being packed in wooden crates, with only small parts of the stones exposed, they would pass muster as the real thing. Unfortunately for the smugglers the Secret Service police had had information of the attempt, and when two Turks and a Greek tried to get the consignment cleared through Customs they were arrested. The stones were then broken up and were found to contain 300 lb. of hashish, valued at roughly £3,000.

Recently also a party of smugglers, wearing the uniform of Consulate officials and carrying a forged letter from the Italian Consulate, obtained delivery without Customs formalities of a suit-case supposed to contain official documents. Luckily the police had received information of this matter also and the party were arrested with the suit-case, which was found to contain cocaine.

When it is intended to land hashish on the shore by means of boats, the drug is always carried in rubber or skin bags which are ready weighted, so that if the boat is seized by the coast-guards the hashish has invariably been dropped over the side before the capture. Occasionally the bags are sunk by means of small sacks containing salt, which dissolves in the water after a few days, causing the hashish to rise to the surface. Usually, however, a consignment thrown into the sea is lost, as the coast-guard patrol-boats have a very shrewd idea when a cargo has been put overboard and watch the area very closely for some weeks. Nevertheless, if the water is shallow, the smugglers will endeavour to recover the narcotic by dragging. When small quantities are landed by means of a man swimming from a boat to the shore the hashish is carried in a water-tight bag, and a line is attached to it so that, if a patrol should pass, the man drops the package, which is then pulled back into the boat. Police and coast-guards are not permitted to fire at suspected smugglers unless first fired upon, and this renders a boat at sea safe from any land patrol—a fact of which the smugglers themselves are very well aware.



Arab Police sighting Smugglers.





The most popular method of running hashish into Egypt is by means of camel across the desert ; it is far more economical ; the risk of loss of the whole consignment is not so great, as, however good the patrol-work, a part of the smugglers can usually escape with their hashish ; and the weather cannot affect the success of the run. To patrol effectively the whole of the deserts of Egypt is, of course, out of the question, for the expense would be enormous ; and, therefore, the contrabandists, by studying the dispositions of the Camel Corps—and their Secret Service is most efficient—can usually find a route on which there is every reason to expect no interference.

The great drawback to the desert, from the smugglers' point of view, is that every passer-by leaves a track, and every mark in the desert sand or gravel has its meaning to the desert-dweller. In fact, the sand is to the Arab what the morning paper is to the average Englishman. The Englishman reads in his paper that Lord and Lady So-and-So have taken up their residence in Grosvenor Square, where they will remain for the rest of the season ; that the Quorn have had a rattling run of forty-five minutes, ending in a kill ; and that the police have caught a motor bandit at Wigan. The Arab gets up in the morning and notes that Sobeih Selim of the Terrabin tribe, with two camels, one a female in poor condition, has gone to cultivate his barley patch at Gebel Maghara ; that Feteih Mubarak's Saluki chased a gazelle but failed to get it ; and that a party of people, with camels he does not recognise, passed within a mile of his

tent during the night. This is exciting, and he does not rest until he has discovered who they are. Probably, after he has followed the tracks for a short distance, he will meet an acquaintance who has also seen the tracks, and who can tell him that they were a party of Ageila Arabs from Nejd looking for a lost camel.

To give some idea of what tracks mean to an Arab I may mention the case of a murder where the murderer, after killing his man, had been met by a girl. This was proved by the trackers, who pointed out the foot-prints of the girl leading up to the track of the murderer and then returning. The girl was very quickly found, for a good foot-print is better than a photograph to an Arab tracker. She admitted that the tracks were hers, but said that she had not met the murderer. What had happened was as follows: she had been out with her flock and suddenly saw foot-prints leading round by some sand dunes. This struck her as being very remarkable—the man had been going fast, he had been alone, and he was not a shepherd, therefore must be a traveller, and yet he had not walked along the recognised path but some five hundred yards away from it. She had been so interested that she had gone up to the tracks to make certain, and had told her father about the matter when she went home that evening. If tracks of this description mean so much to an Arab girl of twelve years of age, one can imagine what they mean to, and how clearly they can be read by, a grown man who makes it his business to understand the riddle of the sands.

It is not only in sandy country that the Arabs can follow tracks, as when hare shooting my shikaris have followed hares with the greatest ease over rocky hills. I have had lessons in the art, and have been able sometimes to see the tracks when they are pointed out to me, but it is quite impossible for the average European to detect them for himself. Usually all the hare has done is to dislodge some small stone under which has collected a minute patch of sand, and this tiny mark, to the trained eye of the Arab, stands out like a huge advertisement poster.

The average Englishman is very sceptical of the work of trackers, and refuses to believe that a mere mark in the sand can mean so much. It must be borne in mind that the Arab does not read the morning news, study the illustrated papers, nor interest himself in photography. He concentrates his whole attention on and trains his eye to read the surface of the desert, and finds it vastly entertaining, exceedingly useful, and far more reliable than the stunt newspapers of England. Whatever may be said of the sand as a source of information, it does not provide a headline scare every other morning, it does not make a man eat brown bread when he prefers white, nor does it dig up some sordid incident in a dead man's past. It is after all clean and reliable.

A photograph or picture means nothing to most desert Arabs—they will probably look at it upside down and fail to see anything—but show them a track of a man and they will give you a very shrewd description of that man, and, what is



more, will recognise the same foot-print years later.

With my slight knowledge of tracking I am able to tell what game are in the vicinity, and roughly the age of the marks, so that I know more or less what I may expect to meet. The information I glean is, in any case, a good deal more reliable than the hearsay evidence I receive, as the Arab is ever an optimist, and, like the Irish keeper, will always try to please, so that he tries to make out that game is plentiful when he knows perfectly well that the situation is hopeless. When I first came out to this country during the war, I and another man used to amuse ourselves by working out the tracks of the various animals, birds and reptiles we saw in the sand, and one day we came across the most extraordinary marks, like the print of a man's hand. This puzzled us enormously, and we finally decided that a pet monkey belonging to the troops must have escaped. With the idea of recapturing the animal we followed the tracks, only to become more puzzled, as it appeared that this particular monkey had his thumbs on the outside of his hands instead of the inside. The mystery was cleared up when we flushed a huge monitor lizard from a bush.

On another occasion, whilst on one of the many futile patrols after non-existent Senussi in the Western Desert, we found the most mysterious marks in the hard sand. It appeared that an extraordinary one-wheeled car with a caterpillar track had gone across the desert in an erratic manner, turning and twisting in every direction.

We followed the track for an hour, and then found an empty petrol tin gaily careering along in the strong desert wind.

Nearly all the Sinai police and many of the Camel Corps are good trackers, and, in addition, in every section and at every post are men specially enlisted for their tracking qualities. In the Camel Corps some of the trackers are from the Southern Sudan who are extraordinarily clever, but I do not know that they are any better than a good Sinai Arab, who has the advantage of being a native of the country. These men possess what amounts to a sixth sense, as they can tell at a glance whether tracks in the desert have been made by smugglers or ordinary wayfarers. They know at once from the foot-prints the speed at which camels and men have been travelling, if the men have been turning round and watching the country, if the camels are heavily or lightly laden; and from these details they draw their conclusions. Briefly, their argument is as follows: "Six men with six camels—if it were ordinary merchandise, such as barley or charcoal, there would be only three men; the party is travelling rather faster than normal; the load carried by the camels is not a full load; and the party is journeying by night, as the dew-marks are on the tracks—it is obvious that the party are not ordinary merchants, but smugglers." One man from the patrol is sent off to the nearest police post to telephone the news across the desert, and the rest of the patrol hurry along on the tracks of the smugglers.

Meanwhile, the news has been telephoned to

every police post in the vicinity of the route taken, and patrols move out to intercept the smugglers. Visibility in the desert is generally good, and as a rule the smugglers are sighted when some two miles away. Then ensues a real man-hunt; the police, fired by the prospect of a good reward, throw all unnecessary equipment off their camels to lighten their load, and particularly enthusiastic individuals have been known to discard their saddles and continue the chase bareback carrying rifles only.

The smugglers are invariably armed, and the moment the police come within range half the party drop behind and open fire. The police adopt similar tactics, but aim at the camels in the hope of bringing one down with its load. When the pursuit becomes too hot the smugglers begin to throw off the hashish, which puts the police in an awkward dilemma. On every pound of hashish the reward is six shillings—and if the hashish is left some passing Arab may steal it—but if the smuggler himself is captured and fined £100 the police will get 90 per cent as a reward. The question is, how, if ever, will the smuggler be able to pay the fine if captured? The financial problem is one that only a bank director could solve; but the desire to get the man who has caused so much expenditure of energy, and has had the temerity to fire on the uniform of the Government, usually prevails, and the chase continues till the smugglers are rounded up. These wild hunts across the desert sometimes last for four days, and the condition of men and camels at the end is most distressing. It happens



frequently that the police camels are so exhausted that they never recover completely from the strain put upon them.

Sometimes at the end of the chase the smugglers will leave their camels, take cover in the rocks, and try to drive off the patrol with rifle fire. If this happens with the police they will also take cover and a musketry battle will take place, which usually ends in a smuggler or two being killed; if, on the other hand, it happens to the Sudanese Camel Corps they fix bayonets and charge, and a six-foot Sudanese behind a bayonet is about as formidable a foe as one would wish to meet. At the end of the hunt the smugglers are roped together and the patrol returns on its tracks to pick up the discarded hashish—and sometimes find that a passer-by has made off with it. Hashish, owing to its great value, is too attractive to leave lying about in the desert for long, and, as a ready market can be found for it, the average wayfarer will not neglect the opportunity should he come across a consignment.

Once a patrol, after a three-day chase across the desert, during which a camel with a full load had been shot, returned to the dead animal to find that the whole consignment of hashish, worth about £600, had been carried off during their absence. This was particularly heart-breaking because, as the smugglers had managed to escape, the unfortunate police had nothing whatsoever to show for their exertions. The reward for the hashish alone, of which they thought they were sure, would have been £45, but as a mean-spirited thief had



made off with it, there was no prospect of receiving anything. Luckily the thief had left tracks behind, and the incensed police swore that whatever happened they would follow him up to the bitter end. The tracks led across the desert for some fifty miles and then ended in the town of El Arish, where the constant passage of people, camels and goats had obliterated them. The police, however, managed to discover what camel-men had come in on that route during the last two days, and, knowing the merchant for whom these men worked, took the law into their own hands and searched the merchant's yard, where they found the whole consignment. This was an extraordinarily lucky finale, as not only did they receive the whole reward for the hashish, but also 90 per cent of the fine paid by the merchant, who, being a man of property, was in a position to pay up, which is very seldom the case with the average Arab hashish-runner. The merchant was the only dissatisfied person, as he seemed to think that, not being a regular smuggler but only an amateur at the game who had endeavoured to get in on the ground-floor of a good thing, it was exceedingly hard luck that he should fall through into the basement and be treated with all the rigour of the law as though he were a professional.

The smuggling fraternity are divided up into three sections—the owners, the agents and the contraband-runners. The owner buys the hashish from a merchant in Syria or Anatolia and instructs him to hand it to an agent, and the agent arranges to run it across to Egypt. Sometimes it is shipped





Four Arab Smugglers with their hashish and escort.



Six-wheeler Car in pursuit of Smugglers.

to the Sinai coast by boat and thence borne by camel, and sometimes it is taken the whole way across the desert by Arabs. The Arab when arrested never knows the owner, and probably does not even know the agent, as he has been employed by a sub-agent. The result is that the unfortunate contraband-runners suffer severe punishment, but the ringleaders usually escape because it is impossible to connect them with the crime.

On one occasion at least the owners and agents were all caught by means of clever work by the trackers. A very large consignment had been landed on the coast, hastily loaded on to camels and run across the desert. A police-patrol, passing a few hours later, saw the tracks and gave chase. Other police-posts were warned and patrols went out in every direction, with the result that not only was the whole consignment captured, but the Camel Corps luckily collided with another consignment coming from a different route and captured that also—the total coming to nearly one ton, valued at £16,000.

The captured Arabs, as is customary, denied all knowledge of ownership, but a policeman remembered seeing, at a wayside station on the railway, close to the scene of the landing, a certain merchant who could have had no real business to transact at that spot. A tracker was sent to examine the tracks at the landing-place, and reported that there had been present seven fishermen, fourteen Arabs and one person who normally wore boots, though he was barefooted on this occasion.

The Egyptian law allows conviction on the corro-



borated evidence of a tracker, and in this case—as an important arrest might follow—two more trackers were sent separately to the spot, and returned with precisely the same account as the first Arab. One man was asked how he could tell the difference between the tracks of a fisherman, an Arab, and a merchant, and replied, in a pitying manner: “Isn’t it quite clear that the feet of a man who has worked always in the sea are not the same as those of a man who works in the desert? And as for the feet of a man who usually wears shoes, well, a child could detect those at twenty paces.”

The suspected merchant, loudly protesting his innocence, was arrested, and the identification parade arranged. A large patch of sand was swept and some ten officials and clerks removed their shoes and socks and walked across it, together with the suspected man. The first tracker was then brought out and, with the air of a Master of Arts asked to do a simple addition sum, pointed at once to the suspect’s track. He was removed and the second tracker brought out with the same result; and when the third tracker followed suit, the merchant burst into tears and confessed. By the means of his evidence six big traders in Cairo and Alexandria, and one from Palestine, were convicted and received heavy punishments, together with some thirty Arabs, fishermen and sub-agents.

Secret service plays an important part in anti-contraband work, but the secret agents employed in the hashish trade, like all secret agents, are an

unsavoury fraternity. For an agent to be acquainted with smugglers' movements he must be in touch with the smugglers themselves, and it frequently happens that, when he gives information of a run, it is only a small consignment used as a ground-bait, and that, while the police are busily occupied in seizing the ground-bait, a huge consignment is being transported by another route.

A favourite dodge with secret agents, particularly those employed by other administrations such as the customs, coast-guards or police, is to give vague information of an intended run, the information being so wide and all-embracing that it might cover any hashish run made in Sinai over a period of six months. Secret service agents receive three-quarters of any reward paid on a capture which has been made as the result of their information, and they therefore very naturally like to be concerned in as many captures as possible. I frequently receive information sent in to me from Cairo or Port Said which says that a large consignment of hashish will be run through Sinai soon between Rafa and Kuntilla. The officer who sends this on to me has probably not looked up the places on the map, and is therefore unaware of the fact that the artful secret service agent has covered the whole of Sinai, and the use of that elusive word 'soon,' which may mean anything up to twelve months, means that the agent has established a claim to any capture the Sinai police may make during the course of the year.

Secret service agents, unlike port, do not improve with keeping, and, like golf balls, should not be

used too often. Once it has become known that Mohammed Ahmed is acting as a secret agent, and news flies fast in the desert, it is pretty obvious that smugglers are going to avoid him like the plague, and he will not be a welcome addition to any cheery little coffee-party over the camp-fire where intending runs are discussed. Secret service agents quickly outlive their usefulness, and the permanent agents employed by most administrations are not found in Sinai—I cannot see any possible use in a man who is addressed by all and sundry as “Ya, Mukhbar” (“Hallo, secret agent”), and who sometimes carries a visiting-card with his calling inscribed on it in large gold characters.

The profits in the trade are so enormous that there will always be individuals willing to run the risk of severe punishment, individuals so lost to all decent feeling that they care nothing for the suffering of the unfortunate drug addicts to whom they supply the narcotic. Egypt, however, is determined to put down this illicit trade, and the punishments inflicted on smugglers are not lacking in severity. Moreover, immediate steps are being taken, through the League of Nations, to adopt the only sure remedy for a very unsatisfactory state of affairs—that is the prohibition of the manufacture of drugs in the countries concerned, which it is hoped will be put into force very shortly.







Waiting for fighting Duck at the mouth of the Wadi El Arish.

## CHAPTER XI.

## NATURAL HISTORY AND SPORT.

“ Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.”—PROVERBS i. 17.

IN the good old days, before every Arab provided himself with a gun, Sinai was in all probability teeming with game ; but when the long jezail began to be manufactured in Egypt and Damascus in the eighteenth century the Arab was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity of replenishing his larder. This meant the extinction of the bigger and heavier antelopes, and the oryx, which still exists in Trans-Jordan and the Hedjaz, was in those days to be found in considerable numbers in Sinai also. To-day not one remains, and the same applies to ostriches, which are still fairly plentiful east of Maan in Trans-Jordan, though even there they are being slowly exterminated by the Arab, who never fails to shoot them if he gets an opportunity ; whilst their eggs, if discovered, are immediately eaten.

At the present time the only fur-game in Sinai is the Dorcas gazelle, which is to be found on all the plains and wide wadis, and particularly in the sandy waste east of the Canal ; the ibex, which inhabits the rocky mountains in the south ; and the hare. None of the above is plentiful, and their

number now is unfortunately far less than before the war, as, owing to the arming of the Arabs both by ourselves and the Turks during the invasion of Sinai, and the raiding of the battlefields for arms at night, practically every Arab found himself in possession of at least two modern rifles and unlimited ammunition at the conclusion of hostilities. Being the most improvident race in the world, and having no ideas on game preservation even from the point of view of supplying themselves with meat, they proceeded to exterminate everything that moved. The Dorcas gazelle on the plains was practically wiped out in the two years that followed the war, and every ibex seen in the mountains, whatever the range, was plastered with bullets, whilst in the summer the Arabs constructed hides round the water-holes and shot them as they came down to drink.

Orders were issued inflicting severe punishments on Arabs found with arms, the sale of ibex and gazelle meat prohibited, and ghaffirs (watchmen) were appointed on various mountains to guard the ibex. This did a certain amount of good, but what really put an end to the wholesale slaughter was the running low of the stock of ammunition, and the deplorable state of the Arab rifles after a few years' neglect. The Arab never cleans or oils his rifle, with the result that the rifling is completely eaten away in a year or so, the bolt-actions and springs break with rust, and the sights become dislodged. It is hoped that in another ten years there will not be a serviceable rifle possessed by the Arabs in Sinai, as a large number are captured

by the police every year, and the Arab has perforce to keep his rifle buried to evade confiscation, which is not the best possible treatment for delicate mechanism.

When the order went forth prohibiting the carrying of arms, as a matter of course no Arab made any attempt to obey it by handing in his rifle. Normally they kept the rifles buried, but whenever they were contemplating a raid, or a little big-game shooting, they dug them up and ran the risk of meeting a police patrol. Searches of tents were made frequently, but proved absolutely abortive, and then the police devised a very clever scheme for making the Arabs produce their arms. A patrol would set forth and on approaching an Arab encampment three of them would put on civilian Arab dress and ride furiously at the tents. Immediately every Arab, thinking they were a hostile raiding party, would run off and get his rifle out of its hiding-place, and at that moment the remainder of the patrol would come over the rise and confiscate the rifles. By this and other means a very large number of the arms illegally obtained by the Arabs during the war have been secured.

Arab admirers have regarded the disarming as unfair and unreasonable, but the other side of the picture is the fact that an Arab is a primitive man who uses a primitive plough and implements, and to allow him to have a modern rifle to assist him in his primitive raids is incongruous. Some of the raids after the war, when the Arabs used modern rifles in good condition and fresh ammunition, were not conducted in the true sporting spirit,



and the casualties were far too heavy. A raid is a relic of Crusader days and should really be carried out with the bow and arrow, or at any rate the muzzle-loading jezail—certainly not with a weapon with a 2,000-yard range.

The shooting and hunting of the Dorcas gazelle has been absolutely prohibited in Sinai for the last seven years, and they are gradually increasing again, but progress is slow. One reason is that the capture of the young gazelle when it is a week or so old is very simple. A mother who has a young one near is not very clever at hiding the fact. Her natural fear for the safety of her offspring, which is lying hidden under a scrub bush, causes her to dance around in a circle about a hundred yards away from the approaching stranger, and to anyone who has studied the gazelle the reason is obvious. Ten minutes' search is all that is needed to find the fawn, and the fact that they are attractive and fascinating pets, and very popular in Egyptian households, adds to the difficulty of preserving the animal.

The statement that they are attractive and fascinating applies only to the first year of their lives ; a male gazelle over a year old is fairly sure of himself and rather insolent, and on reaching the age of two years or more he is most aggressive. His horns grow to great length considering the size of the animal, and are very sharp. He is most intelligent and knows a friend from a stranger ; if he meets a stranger he runs at him with head down and prods him in the stomach ; if he meets his owner he does precisely the same thing, only

he does it in fun. The result is very much the same—I have measured wounds inflicted by a gazelle in anger and in fun and there was little or no difference in the depth.

The tame gazelle always has a rooted objection to boys, and my kitchen-boy would never dare to go into the yard and chop wood until he had satisfied himself that the gazelle was out of sight, as this particular pet, who was a legacy to me from my predecessor, had a passion for catching people bending. If he saw the boy stooping over the wood pile he would creep up to charging distance, measure the range accurately, and go at him as hard as he could with his head down. On one occasion he drove his horns three inches into that part of the body best suited for the purpose, and the boy was in hospital for a week.

Unless one has a garden one cannot keep a gazelle, and if one has a gazelle one cannot keep a garden, so it is rather difficult. He is a very small eater, but shows marvellous aptitude for picking out the important shoots of the most prized creepers, the buds of the first-class roses, and any special plant one has obtained at great trouble. One way and another, he has all the devilment of the most mischievous monkey, but nevertheless is a very attractive and amusing little beast.

The ibex, the wild goat of the mountains, is a very shy animal, and normally lives at a height of 5,000 feet on the rocky mountain-sides, only descending in spring to feed on the white flower of a type of desert broom called 'rhutom' which grows in profusion in all the wadis. If there has

been a considerable amount of rain in the winter the pools that form in the gorges on the mountain-sides do not dry up in summer, and if this is the case the ibex has no need to come down to the wadis for his water. This is always satisfactory, as the Arab is normally too lazy to climb several thousand feet to get ibex meat, and is only interested in shooting when he can do it from hides erected over water-holes in the valleys.

At the present time, owing to the use of motor-cars to assist in big-game hunting, the dice have been unfairly loaded against animals. There is a certain type of individual who will run a gazelle down with a motor-car—a 'sport' which became very popular after the war in Egypt, so that in that part of the Libyan Desert west of Cairo where cars can travel at great speed the gazelle was practically exterminated. One of the Frontier Administration patrols discovered a 'sportsman' in the desert with eleven mangled bodies of gazelles in his cars—some had been run down by the car itself and smashed by the wheels, and others had been despatched at close range from the car with a shot-gun. As the individual in question was a foreigner, and as there are capitulations in Egypt, no legal action could be taken, but luckily there was a British officer with the patrol who took the matter into his own hands, literally, in the most satisfactory manner.

There are few, if any, Britishers who will run an animal down with a car, but the employment of mechanical transport greatly facilitates big-game shooting in some parts of the world, so that the



search for game, which previously took days, can now be accomplished in a few hours. This does not apply to ibex shooting, and nothing has been invented so far that will make this form of sport any easier. One can sometimes travel by car to the foot of the mountain where one intends to camp, which is quite legitimate, but the search for game can be done only on foot and is a lengthy proceeding.

The ibex is the most difficult beast in the world to obtain, as he inhabits the wildest and roughest parts of the mountains, is intensely shy and nervous, and is gifted with a wonderful eye, nose and ear. His nose is perhaps his greatest asset, and it has been proved that he can wind a man a mile away. Unless there is a steady stiff breeze blowing, which is unusual in the Sinai mountains, the hunter is absolutely at the mercy of the changeable puffs of wind that come from all directions owing to the rugged nature of the country. Frequently, after a wearisome stalk of two or three hours, an unfriendly gust will carry one's scent to the ibex and all is over. The scent of man does not make the ibex suspicious, and he does not put his head up and ponder over it for a moment. It apparently hits him as hard as if someone had put a stone in his ribs, and he is off as fast as he can go, and what is more will probably travel four or five miles before he stops.

The luck always seems to be on the side of the ibex. I have had one piece of luck only with him, but in all my other experiences the Goddess of Fortune has been definitely pro-ibex, and does not



seem to have taken the slightest interest in my side of the case. Two of the instances are distinctly humorous, though I may as well admit that I saw no humour in them at the time.

The first concerns some female ibex who are always to be found in Gebel Yelleg, about four hours' run from El Arish, and who are incidentally the only ibex anywhere near the northern coast. These animals do not live in maiden meditation, fancy-free, as at a certain season of the year a fine old male ibex was in the habit of coming up from Southern Sinai—a matter of eighty or ninety miles—to visit them. I imagine it was a sort of secret harem he maintained and which he kept to himself. I had an Arab policeman at the post near-by who was by way of being an amateur shikari, and when the rutting season was near I told him to go and have a look at the mountain and see if there were any signs of the old buck. Passing that way some days later he told me the male ibex was there and that he had a fine head—the finest ever. The Arab is rather like the Irishman in this respect—one's Irish bailiff always tells one that the salmon to be got in the pool one is casting over is the biggest in the country since the days of St Patrick, and the ibex that the Arab shikari is going to put you on to has a head so big that it is a marvel he has the strength to carry it, and there has not been an animal like it since the days of the Prophet Mohammed.

I told him to keep a watch for the animal for two or three days to find out what his movements were, but not to frighten it in any way, and that

I would come down shortly and if I shot the beast I would give him £2. On arrival at the post a week later equipped to shoot, the policeman met me wreathed in smiles, which I thought meant that the ibex was close at hand. He then disappeared into the police hut and emerged with a fresh ibex head of considerable size. With the best possible intentions he had shot the ibex for me to save me the trouble and fatigue of getting it myself, and is still wondering why I was annoyed. His action really was not very remarkable, as physical exertion in the East is regarded as rather vulgar, and not the sort of thing a senior official should indulge in. I once was on inspection in a Western Desert oasis in which was situated a lake that was black with duck. The whole of the morning, whilst working in the office, dealing with complaints and what-not, I had had an eye on the lake half a mile away, and was looking forward to the afternoon when I could get my gun and go and see about it. When the Egyptian officer in charge saw me setting forth with my gun and cartridges, he said, "Oh, don't go and shoot the duck yourself, sir. If you want some I have a policeman who shoots very well. Give him your gun and cartridges and he will get you all you want."

The other ibex episode concerns another big male who lived on Gebel Tarbush, a particularly steep and lofty mountain in Southern Sinai. I had heard a lot about this animal, and had spent three days hunting for him previously without success. On the occasion in question I had started at 5 A.M. and spent the whole day climbing with

no luck. I had seen three or four ibex, but they had all been females or little males with very small heads, and at 3 P.M., realising I had only just time to get down to the valley before sunset, I started to return. In a deep gorge filled with huge boulders the size of small haystacks, I jumped from the top of a rock, a distance of about ten feet, and on landing rather heavily the sling of my rifle broke and the butt landed with a sickening crash on my little toe, breaking the bone. The pain was excruciating, and I let Gebel Tarbush and the whole of Southern Sinai know exactly what I thought and felt. And then at that moment I noticed something on the huge cliff that towered over me—I looked again, and there, silhouetted against the pale lemon of the evening sky, I saw my ibex. He was standing on the edge of the cliff bending slightly forward and looking at me intently. It appeared to me that he wore a shocked and disapproving air, and seemed to be saying, "Never in all my life have I heard such language."

I expected him to whirl round and dash off at once, but apparently he had only seen me and not winded me, and it is the human smell that so terrifies the ibex. Also the gorge was in deep shadow, and it is possible he could not quite make up his mind what I was. My shikari whispered to me that we should take cover and try to work round closer to him, but it was obvious that the ibex had seen us, and for us both to suddenly disappear would arouse his suspicions. I therefore told the Arab to stay exactly where he was without moving, and in full view of the ibex, whilst I tried



to get away to a flank and work up to him. Walking with my injured toe was sheer agony, but I crawled away 150 yards and then started to climb, only to find that, after a few minutes, I had come within view of the ibex, who was still standing motionless on the cliff edge. I tried again with no better luck, and then, realising that with my lameness I could not properly cope with the situation, I estimated the distance very carefully and, deciding it was 300 yards, took a shot. There was an appreciable pause and then the ibex wheeled round and, with a flirt of the tail, was gone. The sickening part of the story is that when I had got down the mountain about half a mile I looked back and saw the spot on which the ibex had been standing and that from which I fired—and it was obvious that he had been within 150 yards of me. My lack of judgment may have been due to the bad light or to the fact that the ibex was almost directly above me, but that I had considerably over-estimated the distance and thereby missed an easy shot at the best head in Sinai was almost as agonising as the pain I suffered getting down the 2,000 feet or so to my camp.

The hare of Sinai is, I suppose, game, although in India I believe it ranks with the kites and jackals as a scavenger on midden heaps. The Sinai hare is only a little larger than an English rabbit, but he is a true hare despite the fact that he occasionally resides in a hole like a rabbit. Apparently he only uses these holes as a refuge when chased by a fox or dog, as otherwise he appears to act as a true hare and spends his spare time in a 'form.' I



estimate that there is one hare to every eight square miles of desert in Sinai, so it is a wearisome business to walk across country on the chance of getting one. Excellent fun can be had with hares if one is on camel patrol, as one is always accompanied by Salukis who thoroughly understand their business. On arriving at a likely piece of country the patrol extends to fifty paces, thus covering a wide expanse of desert, and the Salukis post themselves at different points along the line, running up to every small rise to scan the country in front. Immediately a hare gets up the policeman nearest to him gives a wild yell, which is a very good imitation of a 'view hallo,' and in a moment, as if they had telegraphed themselves to the spot, the whole pack of Salukis are all out after the quarry. From the back of one's mount one gets an excellent view, but as the camel—normally a disgruntled, uninteresting beast—has apparently a sporting strain hidden in him somewhere, and takes charge on these occasions, going off at a lumbering gallop, one is usually too much occupied in trying to avoid coming unstuck to follow the hunt properly. The Salukis must have a very poor field of vision owing to the mass of scrub bushes that obscures their view, but their eyesight is phenomenal, and, unless the hare reaches a rocky hill early in the chase, his doom is sealed. He is not rolled over, however, until he has performed some marvellous right-angled turns that send the Salukis sprawling over each other in the dust, and one way and another a Saluki hunt on camel-back is a sport not to be despised.

The leopard frequents the southern mountains, preying on the ibex and the flocks of the Arabs, and occasionally will take a camel. Like the rest of the fauna of Sinai, the leopard became scarce after the war, but is now increasing in numbers, so much so that complaints of his depredations are frequently made, and two years ago a man was killed by one. It was more or less his own fault, as, finding the leopard making a meal off his camel, he threw stones at it, and the leopard becoming annoyed sprang at him and raked his stomach out with his hind claws. He is not by any means a small beast, as one might expect in a barren mountainous district, and the two skins I possess are 6 ft. 9 ins. and 7 ft. 2 ins. respectively. The variety is the *panthera pardus*, and the colour quite different from the Indian and Sudan leopards, the spots being quite black and the body colour pure white. They are most difficult to obtain as they have no recognised haunts and apparently visit the various mountains in turn, and, Sinai being sparsely populated and distances being great, one does not hear of a kill until weeks afterwards. The only record of a sportsman shooting a leopard is that killed by Mr Robert Hayne, the well-known big-game shot, who paid a visit to Sinai some years before the war—and he was lucky.

He was ibex-shooting, and when scanning the mountain-side with his glasses suddenly noticed a leopard lying asleep under a rock on the opposite side of a gorge. I am not quite certain what the distance was, but believe it was something like 250 or 300 yards. Owing to the nature of the ground,

it was quite impossible to get closer without alarming the animal, and as he was lying flat he offered a very poor target. After waiting for some time for the leopard to wake, Hayne got into position and told the shikari to whistle. He did so, the leopard sprang to its feet and Hayne fired, dropping him dead. This is the story told to me by the shikari and I hope it is correct. He also said it was a very big one and this I know to be true, as I saw the skin some years ago and it is larger than either of the two I possess.

The other animals in Sinai are the sand-fox, hyrax or coney of the Bible, striped hyæna, lynx or caracol, wild cat, jackal, wolf, hedgehog, porcupine, and mole. The most interesting of these are the hyrax, who are rare beasts and not commonly found in the East. They are very much like the guinea-pig, about twice the size, and a rich brown in colour. They inhabit the granite mountains in Southern Sinai and appear to be modern in their views, as one usually sees them in threes—presumably either the husband and wife and co-respondent, or the lady intervening.

The lynx I have never met personally, but there is one in the Cairo Zoo that was caught in Sinai some years ago, and therefore the animal exists but must be very rare. The wolf is somewhat of a mystery and zoologists seem very uncertain about him. He is very much like a big jackal, and I believe there is a certain amount of doubt as to whether he is a distinct species or merely an overgrown jackal. The Arabs are very emphatic that he is a wolf (deeb), and there are stories of wolves that stand as high



as the Canadian timber wolf and kill an enormous number of sheep, but I have never seen one bigger than the ordinary pariah dog.

Arab stories of savage beasts must always be accepted with reserve, as they are told with a purpose—one gets thrilled to the marrow hearing a terrible tale of a hyæna or wolf that attacked an encampment in broad daylight ; but it is as well not to show too much interest, as the story always ends with, “ And now I want permission for myself, sons and nephews to carry rifles.” If one has treated the story with the scepticism it deserves, this request falls flat—otherwise it is difficult to refuse.

The wild cat is a small packet of fury. He is very little bigger than a well-fed English cat, is of a uniform sandy colour, has a tail with black and white rings, and fears nothing. A Camel Corps man once found one crouching under a bush and hit it with his stick, severely wounding it. The cat sprang at the throat of the man’s camel and fixed on it. The camel bolted in terror and was not found for two days ; so it is not known for how long the cat stuck to him clawing his throat.

The hedgehog is only remarkable because the Arabs firmly believe that he is in the habit of sucking female goats. He is very unpopular on this account, as they say frequently they find their goats dry in the morning, with a well-fed, sleepy hedgehog in the vicinity. This is particularly interesting, because the same belief exists all over agricultural England amongst farmers, but has been dismissed as ridiculous by zoologists. The ‘ Field ’ had a long correspondence some years ago in which



farmers testified to having actually witnessed the crime with their own eyes, and experts refused to be convinced. So far as I remember the argument was never settled, both sides holding to their own opinion. As there cannot be the slightest connection between the Arab of Sinai and the agriculturist of England, it is, to say the least of it, a very remarkable coincidence that they should both hold the same belief. A well-known zoologist visited Sinai some years ago, and amongst other things investigated this. I called as a witness my Arab orderly, Osman, who sometimes errs on the side of loyalty. He said most emphatically that the story was true, and that the mother hedgehog sucked the goat, and whilst she was doing this her young ones sucked her.

"Most interesting," said the sceptical expert, "and so what the young hedgehogs were getting was pure goat's milk."

The game birds of Sinai are the two desert partridges, the chikor and Hey's or See See, and the Crowned, Senegal and Imperial sand-grouse; the lesser and Arabian bustard and the quail. The chikor is very well known throughout the East, and there seems every reason to believe that he is the same species as the French or red-legged partridge, as the size and markings are precisely similar, the slight difference in coloration being due to the respective surroundings—the brown partridge colour being less conspicuous in the fields of France and England, and the sandy buff being more suited to the rocky hills of the East.

The Hey's partridge is about three-fifths of the size of the chikor and coloured much the same as

the English partridge, except that the cock has a white blaze on the side of his head. The Hey's is essentially a mountain bird, whereas the chikor is more or less general in every part provided it is not flat desert sand. He must have a rocky hill in the vicinity as his headquarters in which to take cover when hawks or humans are at hand. Both types keep in the most perfect condition by feeding on camel-droppings on the caravan roads, small insects, and the seeds of the small desert plants that spring up all over the desert during November and die off in May. These birds are somewhat drier to eat than the English partridge, but make a most welcome change from the lamb, veal, chicken routine of Egypt, as there is probably no food in the world quite so deadly boring as Egyptian veal and chicken.

Although very little shot over, both these partridges leave nothing to chance, and their behaviour normally is that of the harried residue of a badly shot-up covey on a London business men's syndicate shoot at the end of January. They trust to their legs rather than their wings: and as they can run at a steady four miles an hour it is difficult to get close to them. If unduly pressed they will rise when the gun is 100 yards away and fly for a quarter of a mile and then run again. Luckily there are certain rules they observe—one is, when disturbed they always make for rocky, high ground, and having reached it never go up the open hillside but choose a small water-course. Cutting across country and making a stealthy approach to the edge of the gorge will usually result in flushing the covey at easy range. Also if by chance one should kill the

old cock in charge of the covey, their organisation goes to pieces and the remaining birds squat among the boulders and can be put up singly. The only drawback to this is that the old cock is invariably in the van of the retreat and very seldom gives one a chance. Attempts to drive the birds have always been unsuccessful, as their sense of danger is remarkably acute and they will fly anywhere but over the guns.

A great help in steadying up a covey is the presence of a peregrine falcon or other bird of prey. Practically every other bird in Sinai is a falcon, hawk or eagle, and if one has partridges on the move it frequently happens that the hawk comes along to enquire into matters. This has an instantaneous effect, and the covey will suddenly disappear under scrub bushes and stones and have to be literally kicked up. On several occasions my Arab shikari has had to flick stones at a squatting bird to shift him.

The Wadi Gedeirat, where there is a plentiful supply of water and a considerable amount of corn, is used as a breeding haunt, and in September and October there are usually from fifteen to sixteen coveys of anything up to twenty birds each. This preserve is looked after by two Arab policemen who take the greatest interest in it and who have adopted the dictatorial manner of the English keeper. I receive telephone messages practically ordering me to come down to shoot before the rains, when the birds scatter, and last year the head man gave me a list of the guns who should be invited—and, what is more to the point, a black-



The Author and his Shikaris.





list of people who should *not* be invited as they were 'mush nafi' (no good). Many English keepers might go so far as to suggest to their masters the guns who should be invited to shoot a choice preserve, but very few would dare to black-ball their master's guests. In fairness to my Arab keepers, I must admit they have had just cause for complaint, as two or three times I have had guns with me who have not hit a feather, and on these occasions it has been most difficult, as the shikaris, presuming the sportsmen do not understand their dialect, make the most appalling remarks about lack of skill. One remark I overheard was, "How is your officer shooting?" and the reply, "Zai zift" (Rotten)—"my old wife would do better."

The sand-grouse shooting is not good as the birds only water in Sinai spasmodically, and a morning flight can never be relied upon. I have had very good days with them, but nearly always when least expected, with the result that cartridges have invariably failed me long before the flight ended.

Quail shooting can be obtained in March on the return migration, but is poor sport, as the birds always frequent the small barley patches and gardens by the sea which are filled with men, women, children and animals. If one does not mind peppering a donkey or an old woman every other shot a good bag of quail can be got, but the risk of hitting someone is far too great to make it attractive to the average sportsman. On the inward migration in September and October the quail are far more

plentiful, but they arrive on the sea-shore at dawn, rest there for a few hours and then fly southwards, never alighting in Sinai again. The people of El Arish make a big profit out of the quail by catching them in nets and exporting them to Europe. This trade is dealt with more fully in another chapter.

As Sinai is on the main route of the northerly and southerly migration, it needs an ornithologist to enumerate every species of bird that passes through, as they are legion. Practically every migrant is to be seen, and as the gardens of El Arish make convenient embarkation and disembarkation camps, it is very interesting to find the trees swarming with hundreds of chiffchaffs one morning, all of whom have departed by the evening, to be replaced by flocks of chaffinches the following day. One is naturally more interested in the English garden birds than any others, and it is very consoling every winter to have two or three blackbirds chuckling wickedly in the tomato-plants, and, as usual, taking toll of the ripe fruit. A few thrushes also are seen, the English robin, a flock of goldfinches who presumably are of Palestinian origin, and last but not least a pair of woodcock who become quite tame and walk about on the irrigated flower-beds driving their long bills into the soil in search of grubs.

Among the indigenous birds may be mentioned the crested, sand and bifasciated larks; the mourning chat, who is an attractive fellow in black and white and who sings very cheerily despite his bereavement; the brown-backed raven; the golden eagle; and a host of other birds of prey of the

falcon, buzzard, harrier, vulture, and hawk tribes. In fact, the predatory birds are so numerous that one wonders how any other species survive.

The reptiles of Sinai are not numerous—in summer one sees a fair number of the monitor lizard, who looks very much like a Dachshund when running, and who to protect himself uses his tail as a lash. This always preserves him from dogs, as the average dog receiving a lash across his body with a whip at once jumps to the conclusion that he has offended master in some way and comes back with his tail between his legs. Luckily snakes are not plentiful, the commonest being the horned viper, a most unpleasant little beast who comes out after dusk and who moves sideways by raising his coils laterally; for this reason the Arabs call him Abu Genabia (the Father of Going Sideways), and it would take a wise man to think of a better name.

The bite of a horned viper is very poisonous, but not fatal unless neglected. During a camel trek in Sinai some years ago one of the Arab police, gathering wood after dark, was bitten in the hand and found half an hour later in a state of coma. Luckily there were two women in the party who had done some amateur nursing during the war. They cut open the palm of his hand with a razor-blade, burnt it with a hot ember from the fire, put a tourniquet on his arm, gave him a quarter of a bottle of whisky, and, taking his arms, walked him up and down for half an hour—what time two horrified Lords of Creation, their husbands, feeling extremely sick, cowered over the fire. The spartan treatment, however, was most successful, as the



policeman, except for a whisky headache, was quite fit the following day.

There are a large number of amateur Rowland Wards in the Arab world, and anything more uncanny and terrifying than an animal stuffed and set up by a Beduin cannot be imagined. A well-meaning Arab policeman, having killed a fox, stuffed it with chaff, set it up in a rigid telegraph-wire frame, and fitted it with a huge scarlet tongue of red flannel and vermilion bead eyes. Anything less like a fox I have never seen, as it resembled some horrible obscene freak from the nether regions. It was placed in my honour in the centre of the hearthrug in a Rest House, but unfortunately I made its first acquaintance in the dark, and when I saw this terrifying object by the light of a candle I received the shock of my life. Two of my dogs bolted with their tails tucked in, but the third—an Aberdeen terrier—showing far more pluck and presence of mind than his master, tore it to pieces.

I have in my possession some wonderful specimens of Arabs' taxidermy, including a pair of ibex horns on what appears to be a pug-nosed Pomeranian's head, a wild cat that resembles a furry pig, and a leopard-skin so stretched and strained that the animal looks as if it were of the crocodile species. Incidentally, as regards length, this is easily the record leopard of the world, but unfortunately, like Euclid's definition of a line, it has no breadth.

The game fishing of the Akaba Gulf has never been properly exploited, and though I have not had very much luck myself I feel that, if one had time to explore the various bays and headlands,

excellent fishing could be obtained by means of dead bait trolled from a boat. I have caught barracouta and sand-mackerel up to 45 lb. by this method, and have several times been broken by fish of great size with which I have been unable to cope. My failure has usually been due to my inability to follow the fish up with the boat. Arab boatmen are the worst natural sailors in the world, and to make things more difficult their gear almost invariably breaks at the critical moment. If one hooks a big fish and yells excitedly for the crew to row after it to take the strain off the rod, the result is invariably two loud cracks and either the rowlocks or the oars have snapped, sometimes both, and at the same time the halyards break and the sail falls on top of the rod. In these circumstances a 20 lb. fish is a fool if he cannot get away, and like a true angler I attribute all my many disasters to anybody but myself.

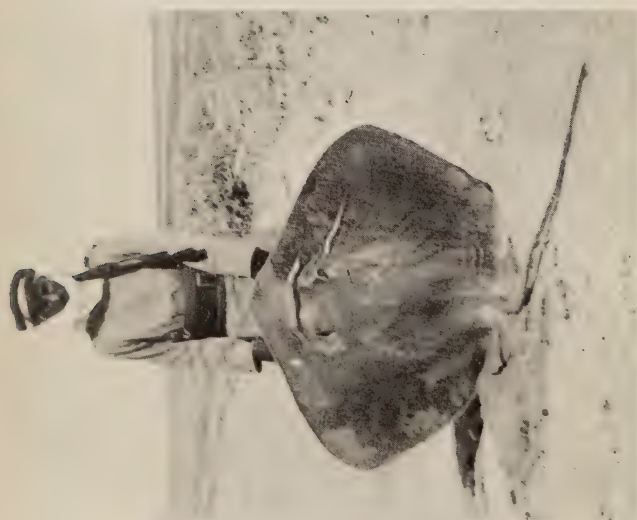
One of the drawbacks to the Gulf is the prevalence of sharks, and one's only desire, when one has hooked a fifteen-footer in a cranky boat filled with frightened Arabs falling over themselves, is to get rid of one's catch before the boat overturns and provides a supply of ground-bait. A shark is a very foul fish, and there is little gratification in killing one except to rid the waters of a very unpleasant inhabitant.

An Arab fisherman told me one of the most gruesome and incidentally amusing shark stories I have ever heard. A small Arabian steamer was anchored in the Gulf of Akaba and one of the crew dived in to have a swim. He was immediately

attacked by a twenty-foot shark who bit him clean in half and went off with the legs and lower part of the trunk. What transpired was probably one of the most callous actions that has ever occurred in the angling world, and the use of the most gruesome bait, but I am assured by those on the spot that the fisherman was actuated by the most laudable motives only. The captain of the ship, infuriated at the death of his friend, baited a shark hook with the remaining half of the unfortunate sailor and immediately hooking the man-eater ran him up to the masthead by means of the winch and riddled him with rifle bullets. I assume this is what the shark would call being hoist with his own petard.



A brace of Milk-fish from the Gulf of Akaba.



A Sting Ray hooked in error.





## CHAPTER XII.

## THE MONASTERY OF ST. CATHERINE.

“ Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men.”—  
JEREMIAH ix. 2.

THE Monastery of St. Catherine owes its inception in the first place to the pilgrims and hermits from the Near East, who found refuge in Southern Sinai from the first century onwards. The selection of Sinai as a retreat was partly due to the fact that it was the supposed site of the law-giving and wanderings of the Israelites, and partly because it was outside the sphere of Roman influence, and Christians could follow their religion without fear of martyrdom. The site of the monastery in those days was only one of many hermit settlements, and there were communities in most of the valleys in Southern Sinai, the most important being those in the Wadi Feiran, by Gebel Sifsaf, and Gebel Um Shomer. There seems to have been a considerable amount of doubt as to which of the many imposing peaks in the south of the Peninsula was the true Mountain of the Law, and for several centuries Gebel Serbal was accepted generally, with the result that the hermit city of Paran was built at its foot and became in time a bishopric with a cathedral, the ruins of which still remain. A strong little stream flows through the wadi and provided sufficient water for

the maintenance of gardens and orchards that supplied the hermit population with the scanty fare that hermits demand, whilst the hillsides along this valley are a veritable honeycomb of hermit cells, some of them being carved from the rock, though the majority are built up of stones and plastered with clay.

The settlement at Gebel Mousa was not so numerous, but in the year 342 A.D. they were visited by Queen Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, who was greatly impressed by the fact that the Burning Bush was still in existence at the foot of the mountain. She gave orders for the existing church to be built and to be dedicated to the Holy Virgin ; later it was known as the Church of St. Catherine, but at the present time it is called the Church of St. Helena. Incidentally, a straggling plant of the bramble species, not indigenous to Sinai, still grows there. Its roots are within the church itself, and the shrub which climbs up the walls is carefully protected by a lattice fence. I do not think it is pretended that it is the identical Burning Bush, though it is very carefully tended by the monks, and devout pilgrims always carry away a leaf as a memento.

At the beginning of the sixth century A.D. the Beduins became most aggressive toward the hermits, robbing and murdering them and rifling the churches of vestments and ornaments ; whilst in one of the complaints sent in by the bishop it is mentioned that the Arabs ate the sacramental bread and defiled the altars. Tor, then known as Raithou, was attacked by a negro race from the Sudan, known as

the Blemmyes, who landed in boats and massacred many of the monks and hermits in residence at the branch monastery of St. Catherine. Whilst the raid was in progress a young monk pushed their boats off from the shore, leaving the Blemmyes stranded, and they were then attacked by a party of Beduin from Wadi Feiran who wiped them out to a man. It is stated in the account of the episode that the archery of the Beduin was far superior to that of the Blemmyes, and that the latter were shot down one by one as they ran for cover. This was only one of many incidents, and it is chiefly remarkable because the attack came from the Sudan, and the Beduin apparently viewed it in the light of poaching on their preserves.

Justinian, who was then Emperor of Rome, was viewing the Arab activity with some concern. A century had to elapse before the teachings of Moham-med began to stir up the inhabitants of Arabia to wage a holy war on all infidels, but the Arab race had been increasing in power and numbers to such an extent before the birth of Mohammed that a tendency to move northwards against the southern frontier of the Roman Empire was apparent at least a hundred years before the general invasion took place.

As a Christian, Justinian was no doubt considerably exercised about the safety of his co-religionists who were worshipping at the site of the law-giving, but he was far more concerned with the provision of an outpost in the southern confines of his empire to check the inroads of the Arabs. News was brought to him of the straits of the hermits in Southern Sinai,



and as the result he ordered the erection of a strong castle at the Church of St. Helena. This was built in the year 530 A.D., and is a massive construction 280 feet by 250, of enormous blocks of granite, some of the stones in the lower courses being five feet square ; whilst at each corner there is a round tower loopholed for archery. On many of the stones are carved Maltese crosses, and the work generally is a first-class testimony to the masons of the sixth century, as it has withstood the passage of fourteen hundred years and will in all probability remain almost indefinitely owing to the weather-resisting properties of the granite blocks. Strategically its position is unsound, as it is commanded by the mountains that rise sheer on either side of it ; and it is said that when Justinian heard of this he sentenced the builders to death.

Inside the walls are the Church of St. Helena, a Mosque that dates back to early Mohammedan days, the cells of the monks, a rest-house for visitors and pilgrims, bakery, refectory, library, stabling, mill, olive press, innumerable small chapels, &c. In fact, a small and complete town enclosed within four walls.

The building stands in a narrow valley, or rather a cleft in the mountains, with the huge towering mass of Gebel Mousa to the south and a smaller peak to the north. To the west is the big plain of Rahab where it is believed the Israelites camped during the time that Moses was receiving the laws on the Holy Mount. Outside the monastery, and fed by the spring that flows down the mountain-side, is a garden with stately cyprus trees of great

height and a well-stocked orchard of olive, almond, pear and orange trees and grape vines. In every cleft in the mountain-side, and round the corner of the Gebel Mousa at Raha, the monks have constructed small gardens for vegetables and fruit, so that, with the exception of corn, the monastery is self-supporting. The olives are pickled and also pressed for oil, the grapes are dried into a species of raisin, and the remainder go to provide a rather rough but invigorating wine, while the pears—which are of a somewhat wooden variety—have extraordinary keeping qualities and last almost from harvest to harvest.

In addition to the orchards around the monastery the monks also maintain gardens at Tor, Wadi Feiran, Wadi Hebran and Wadi Isla. In fact their ingenuity and industry in making use of every insignificant trickle of water are proof that wildernesses need not be desolate deserts if the population are virile enough to contend with nature, and if no man has lived in vain who has made two blades of grass grow where one grew before, the monks of the monastery can meet their end with equanimity.

Assisting the monks in the work of the monastery are a strange race called the Gebeliya. They are not of Arab stock but are the descendants of the Wallachian slaves sent by Justinian to serve the monastery in the sixth century. There are about 400 still existing, and as they live outside the walls they had perforce to embrace the Mohammedan faith shortly after the Hegira; but their religion is of a vague variety, as, though they profess to be

Moslems, they appear to have distinct Christian leanings and look to the monks as their masters and advisers.

A custom that dates back to the earliest days of the monastery is the feeding of the local Arabs, and at 9 A.M. every morning any Beduin who is short of food and who presents himself below the walls will have lowered to him in a basket two loaves of unleavened bread. At times, when the Arabs are grazing their flocks in the vicinity, there may be upwards of a hundred applicants, but the normal number who attend is usually in the neighbourhood of twenty.

In the garden is the Crypt where the bones of all the monks who have died at the monastery are stored; and at the doorway, clad in his hermit robes, is the skeleton of Stephen, who is supposed to have been a hermit in the vicinity before the building of the monastery. One of the monks told me that several of the skeletons are those of women, presumably from a nunnery which existed near in early days.

There are normally from twenty to thirty monks in residence—some of these remain permanently in Sinai till they die, but others are transferred from time to time to the Sinai monasteries that exist in Roumania, Syria and other parts. One cannot dismiss the monks of Mount Sinai without a testimony to their wondrous hospitality and kindness. One of the chief charms of a visit to this remote spot is the opportunity of meeting and being entertained by a community whose old-time courtesy and dig-



nity savour of the past and are not to be met with in the outside world.

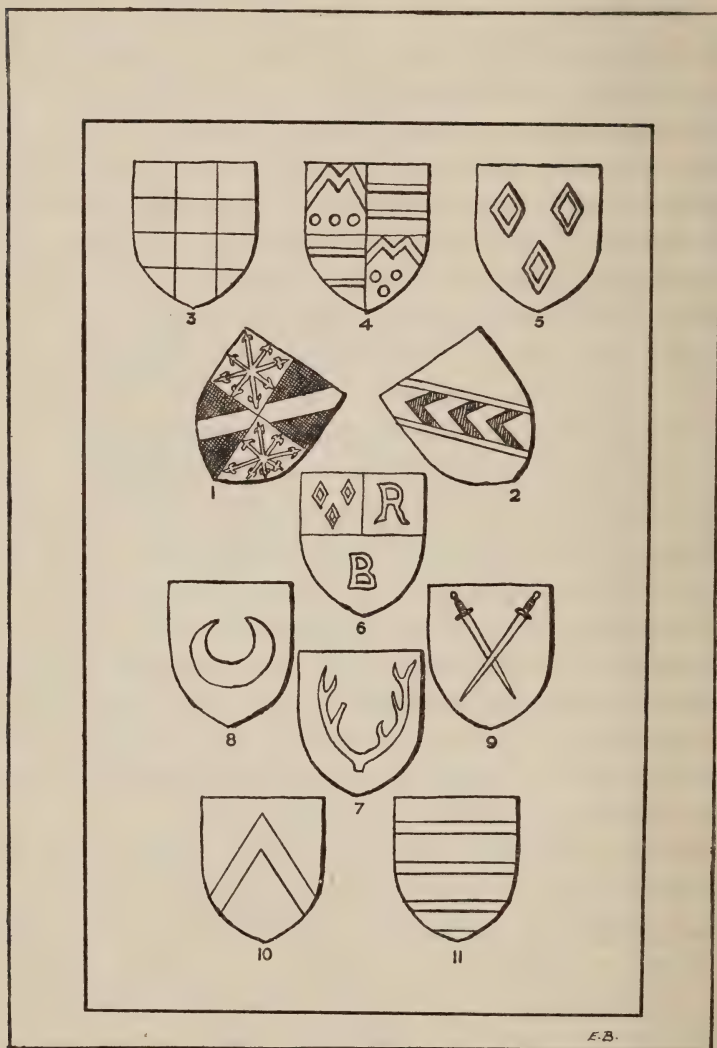
The church is in the Byzantine style, with five windows on either side. The roof is supported by six granite columns and is of cypress wood, but unfortunately, in recent years, the outside of it has been repaired with corrugated iron, which is out of harmony with the remainder of the buildings inside the square. In the apse are mosaics of Christ with Moses and Elijah on either side, of Moses kneeling before the Burning Bush and holding the Tablets of the Law, and a male and female figure who are said to represent Justinian and his wife, Theodora.

On both sides of the church are innumerable ikons or holy pictures in wood of great antiquity, that represent various episodes in the Old and New Testaments: whilst vast candelabra hang from the roof and are used to light the church at the early morning services. The doors, which are said to be the original ones and are therefore fourteen hundred years old, are apparently of cypress wood and are of particular interest, as roughly carved upon them are the coats of arms of various knights who visited the monastery during the Crusades.

In the refectory, upon the table, which is of the same date as the doors, and upon the walls, are cut other coats of arms with crests and two names, 'Comneys' and 'De Courcy.' I took rubbings of all these arms and sent them to the 'Albany Herald,' Colonel Sir Wolseley Haig, but owing to the fact that the colours were shown in only one case he could not do very much towards definitely identi-



fying them. His letter on the subject, however, is of considerable interest.



“DEAR SIR,—I was very much interested by the rubbings of armorial bearings from the Monastery of St. Catherine’s, which you sent me with your letter of Nov. 4.

"I fear that they cannot be dated back to the eleventh century, for armorial bearings cannot be traced beyond the middle of the twelfth century, and there is very good evidence that they did not exist before that date. They had, however, made their appearance before the opening of the Third Crusade in 1182. It is reasonable to suppose that they were introduced when knights began to cover their faces and required to adopt some devices by which they could be identified. There is one other detail which enables us to fix a date before which some of these arms could not have been borne. The first shield which you give is quarterly, and one other is impaled, and the practice of quartering and impaling arms was not known before the middle of the thirteenth century.

"I fear that I have been able to do but little in the way of identifying these arms, for only in one or two instances are the colours given, and arms cannot be identified unless the colours are known. Again, some of the arms are undoubtedly foreign, and I have no great knowledge of the armory of Continental nations. I enclose, however, a few notes on the arms, and I am very sorry that I cannot do more.

"Yours faithfully,

"(Sgd.) WOLSELEY HAIG, Lt.-Col.,  
'Albany Herald.'"

#### NOTES.

1. I believe the first and fourth quarters of this coat to be the arms of the Kingdom of Navarre (Gules, an escarbuncle or). The tinctures of this coat are not given, and six or seven English families bear an escarbuncle, but my reason for assigning this coat to Navarre is that the second and third quarters, which I cannot identify, are certainly a foreign and not a Scottish or English coat.

2. I cannot identify these arms, but they are certainly foreign, for there is no Scottish or English coat in the least like them.

3. I cannot read the inscription over this coat. The arms are 'chequy,' but as the tinctures are not given they cannot be identified. Some twenty or twenty-five English families have borne a chequy coat, the best known being chequy or and azure,

the arms of the family of de Gurenne or de Warenne, afterwards Earls de Warenne and of Surrey, quartered by the Duke of Norfolk; the Marquis of Abergavenny, and the Earl of Derby.

4. I cannot identify this coat, but the first and fourth quarters are certainly foreign. The second and third, two bars, might belong to any one of a large number of families, the tinctures not having been given.

5. This coat, three mascles, the tinctures not being given, might belong to the Scottish family of Wardlaw of that Ilk, to the Barony of Cessford, or to any one of some twenty English families. I do not understand the strange marshalling of the second example of this coat—6—bearing the letters R. and B. It is not British.

7. This, if an English coat, is that of the family of Zakesley (argent, a hart's attire sable), but this bearing is not uncommon in Germany.

8. This simple coat, a crescent, might belong to any one of many English and two or three Scottish families.

9. This coat, two swords in saltire, hilts and pommels in chief, may be that of the Devonshire family of Holway.

10. This coat, a chevron, the tinctures not being given, might belong to any one of very many families. The Scottish families of Lidderdale, Taillifer of Faircleugh, and Pinkerton, bear a plain chevron. The best-known English families bearing a plain chevron are Prideaux, Trelawney, Ladbroke, D'Abernon, Touchet, Stafford and Curle.

11. I cannot identify this coat.

Around the ramparts of the monastery is a covered way, the reason for which is obvious, as, owing to the proximity and height of the mountains on two sides, the whole of the interior of the building was exposed to the discharge of arrows—and the Beduins of the past, we are told, were wonderfully expert archers. The covered way is loop-holed the whole length, and there are some quaint old culverins and small cannon in position dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that must have been more dangerous to the gunner than to the enemy.

The doorway is six feet high and three feet broad







Interior of the Monastery showing the Belfry, which is not quite in harmony with the remainder of the Church.

only, and there are three massive doors covered with iron plates and loop-holes for bows. On opening the first one steps into a narrow passage with a loop-holed wall of cut stone on either side; the second door is as strong as the first, and after passing this the passage takes a right-angled turn and leads up to the third door. It can be understood readily that the forcing of an entrance through the doorway would be an almost impossible task if the defenders made full use of the loop-holes set in the wall—incidentally, the monks say that, despite its checkered history, and the fact that it was for well over a thousand years surrounded by a fanatical and aggressive enemy of a different faith, the monastery survived the attacks made upon it, and has never been captured. They say naïvely that several times it has been on the point of falling but always at the critical moment there has been some act of God that has saved it. It is surely something of a miracle that this outpost of the Christian faith should have been immune for all these years, for, though the Prophet Mohammed himself was not fanatical against other religions, and is said to have given the monastery a firman protecting it from aggression, the same cannot be said for his followers, particularly during the period of the Crusades, when the greatest intolerance was shown by both sides. Mohammed the Prophet, in fact, is said to have visited the monastery, and at the top of Mount Moses one is shown the footprint of his camel in a granite slab. It is said that this naga (she-camel) was a miraculous beast of enormous size, and stood with one foot in Sinai, one in Mecca, one in Jerusalem and one in

Damascus. The Arabs, however, are somewhat vague about the footprint, and some hold the view that it is that of the camel of the Nebi Saleh. Exactly who Saleh was I have never been able to discover, but he is venerated in Sinai and the Arabs say that he dated back to before the days of Mohammed. His tomb stands in the Wadi Sheikh, four miles from the monastery ; and every year the tribes of Southern Sinai gather there to feast on a lamb that is sacrificed.

On the north side of the monastery is the windlass by means of which visitors used to be wound up the walls in a boatswain's chair, but in these piping times of peace the windlass, which is many hundreds of years old, is used only to lower the food to the waiting Arabs below the walls.

The olive-press is another relic of the past, and the same applies to the flour-mill. Both these old implements, which are several hundred years old, are in constant use ; and the mill, which is worked by a mule, is used to grind the corn which the monks produce on their land in the Nile Valley, a present to them from one of the Khedives of Egypt.

The ecclesiastical vestments, which are stored in huge chests, are of enormous value—the textiles of the robes being of great age and marvellous workmanship—whilst the garments are studded with precious stones of all kinds. The censers, mitres, processional crosses, etc., of which there are a great number, are also masterpieces of mediæval art and are encrusted with semi-precious stones.

The great feature of the convent, however, is its library, in which are stored an enormous number



of illuminated manuscripts of great age. The most famous book was the 'Codex Synaticus,' which was of great value, as it helped to confirm the translation of the Books of the New Testament. This book was acquired by the Russian Government in 1859—exactly how it changed hands is not known—and previous to the war it was in the Petrograd Museum. What its fate is in the Bolshevik days no one can say. The 'Codex Synaticus' dated back to 400 A.D., and there are various manuscript copies of the different books of the Bible illustrated in colour that are attributed to the eighth and ninth centuries.

The monastery is dedicated to St. Catherine, the patrician maid of Alexandria, who was broken on a wheel for professing the Christian faith during the Roman occupation of Egypt. It is said that her body was afterwards carried by angels and deposited on the top of Gebel Caterina, whence it was removed to the Church of the Monastery. The legend runs that the bones of the body exuded oil which had very holy properties, and pilgrims from all parts of the world visited the monastery to obtain a small phial of this oil which the monks collected.

The water supply of the monastery is a small stream that flows down the mountain-side—about half-way it forms a small pool on the shoulder of the mountain and here the monks have made a garden and a chapel. The water then runs into a reservoir attributed to Justinian and thence into a well inside the walls. The remainder of the water flowing beneath the walls forms a pool for the Arabs to fill their goolas (pots) and then goes to irrigate



the garden. The water never fails, but after a dry winter it becomes very scanty ; and occasionally the shortage is so acute that some of the trees die for want of irrigation.

The religious fanaticism that the Crusaders brought in their train does not appear to have prevented the pilgrimage to Sinai, as from the twelfth to the fifteenth century there were more visits paid to the monastery than at any other time, but it is also noticeable that the travellers seem to have made the journey in large parties of thirty and forty. Apparently also, during the actual wars of the Crusades, Frankish knights used to make the pilgrimage to the monastery. In the days of the First Crusade, Sinai was a sort of No-Man's-Land and not occupied by either of the contesting powers, so that a small, well-armed party could make the journey without risk ; but later on, when the Kingdom of Jerusalem fell, the Crusaders could only visit the monastery by permission of the Saracen Sultan. The coats of arms found at the monastery are not earlier than the Third Crusade, when the Saracens occupied the whole of the Near East with the exception of a few coast towns in Palestine, and one can only conclude that parties of knights were permitted to make the pilgrimage by order of Saladin, who, despite the religious fervour with which he waged war on the infidel, was a most broadminded, tolerant and courtly man.

During the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon at the close of the eighteenth century, two officers were detailed by the Emperor to visit the monastery and report on it. They found that the eastern wall,

undermined by the floods that sweep down the valley, had collapsed, and that the monastery was suffering from a period of depression as there were only six monks in residence. Later, by order of General Kléber, a large party of masons were sent from Cairo and the wall was effectually repaired with blocks of granite similar to those used by Justinian.

The Mountain of the Law (Mount Moses) is 8,000 feet high and towers over the monastery, though the crest cannot be seen from the walls. There are steps made up the mountain-side to the summit, on which stands a chapel and also a mosque, and the huge granite blocks that lie scattered along the path are covered with rough crosses carved by the pilgrims of the past. A feature of the monastery is the intense cold that reigns there during the winter months. From December till March the night temperature always falls below freezing, and the spells of bad weather that mean rain in northern and Central Sinai are responsible for heavy falls of snow at the monastery. Normally all the mountain peaks of this area are white with snow patches for two or three months in the year, but the drifts only lie on the northern slopes and in crevices, as the sun's rays, even in mid-winter, have considerable power. Owing to its position under Mount Moses, the monastery is in shadow from 1 P.M. till sunset, and immediately the warm rays depart an intense and penetrating cold is felt that makes one long for log fires of vast size, and unfortunately the monastery only runs to charcoal braziers. In summer-time the sun is off the monastery at about 3 P.M.

and this comes as a blessing, as fourteen hours of unbroken sunshine of great power for six months in the year is a burden that the sun fanatics in England do not realise when they cry eternally for sunshine.

After days jogging on a camel or hours jolting in a car through a barren desert of stern granite mountains, one rounds a craggy corner in the midst of desolation to see in a cleft in the mountain-side a group of cypress and almond trees, and behind them the grey walls of the monastery. It comes as a surprise and a shock—albeit a pleasant one—to see anything that savours of civilisation in this rugged wilderness, and it is hard to realise when one is sitting with the monks and dealing with a glass of wonderful liqueur brandy that only five minutes before one was without doubt in annihilation's waste in its wildest form.

Another peculiar charm of the monastery is the incense-like smell of the various small scrub bushes that grow on the mountains. Every one of these small plants has a strong spicy scent, the most penetrating of which is the *sheer*, which looks like a form of sage, and the combination of all of them to anyone burdened with a marked olfactory sense is remarkable but not unpleasant. I use the word 'burdened' because normally a good nose is not a blessing in the East; but in the monastery region this strong aromatic scent that savours of incense and permeates everything gives an odour of sanctity in the literal sense to the surroundings that has, perhaps, a more impressive effect on one than anything else.



The Archbishop with the Monks of the Monastery.





## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE LOCUST CAMPAIGN IN SINAI.

"And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they."—EXODUS x. 14.

THE plate facing page 243, drawn by Mr Edward Ballard, Head of the Plant Protection Department of the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture, is a reproduction in the Egyptian bas-relief style of the history of the Locust Campaign in Sinai. The hieroglyphics along the top of the frieze, which are in the ancient Egyptian script, read—

"First campaign of victory against the locusts in Sinai.

BALLARD."

The figure on the left of the big picture is a Sinai policeman distributing poisoned bran. The next figure is a Shawish (sergeant) of the Egyptian Army receiving the discharge from a flame-gun in his stomach, delivered by a nafar (private) of the Army; then comes a line of troops digging a trench, in front of whom is a private erecting a tin barrier; whilst on the extreme right of the picture is the officer directing operations. The moon in the left corner, and the sun on the right, denote that the work continued by day and by night.

In the lower part of the tablet the symbols denote



*E. Bailard.*

the various personnel, animals and articles used during the campaign. From left to right they are: a heap of poison bran, a six-wheeler car, camel, pot of molasses for sweetening bran, a worker mixing bran with another pouring water out of a petrol tin, a line of camels loaded with bran with the sheikh in charge, a gunner's assistant pumping up the flame-gun of a gunner, an Egyptian official in charge of a gang of workmen, a newspaper correspondent, and finally the three principal munitions of war—the flame-gun, shovel, and sack of poison bran.

The locust is no stranger to Egypt, and the Egyptian cultivators learned to fear him 3,300 years ago, as there is a bas-relief of a locust on one of the tombs at Thebes, whilst in the Book of Exodus the locust invasion is recorded as one of the plagues God sent to convince Pharaoh that the people of Israel should be released from bondage. On this occasion it is stated that they ate up every green thing in the Nile Valley, and that there was darkness over the land from the swarms that covered the sun.

Much has been learned in recent years about locusts, and the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture has a Plant Protection Department that for the last two and a half years has devoted its energies to the study of this pest. Practically the whole of Africa and Asia are subject to locust invasions, but so far as Egypt and the adjoining countries are concerned, the homes of the locusts, who make sporadic invasion into the cultivated land in the Nile Valley and Palestine, are in Central Arabia, the North-Western Sudan, and the Eastern Sudan



and Abyssinian border. In these places the locusts, like the poor, are always in evidence, and, roughly every ten to fifteen years, for some cause that so far has not been explained, the locusts migrate in a northerly direction. Some move due north to the Nile Valley, some through Trans-Jordan into Palestine, Syria and Anatolia, whilst some cross the Libyan Desert and spread to Tripoli and Morocco. These swarms appear generally to have a definite objective, and do not merely follow the wind, as was commonly supposed in the past. This has been proved by a swarm, blown southwards by a northerly gale, reappearing a few days later in much the same place, with every insect beating up against the wind and endeavouring to maintain the general direction.

These migrating masses do a certain amount of damage, but they are usually too much occupied in making for their objective—*i.e.*, a suitable breeding-ground, to stay in any one spot for sufficient length of time to devastate the country to any great extent. The breeding-places are usually sandy spots where the soil is damp enough to assist incubation and where there is some herbage to provide food-stuffs for the 'hopper.' The locusts seem to avoid cultivated ground as a nursery—possibly because they have an instinct that man has no friendly feeling for their young—and therefore these breeding-places are usually in the desert. The great danger to the crops is from the 'hopper,' and later from the mature insect when he gets his wings, as in both these stages he is ravenously hungry.

There is still a vast amount to be learned about locusts and the best means of combating them, but that they migrate roughly every decade is proved, so that in the year 1940 or 1945 the Egyptian Government should gird up its loins and be prepared for the fray. To a certain extent they were caught napping in 1930, but this was due to the fact that the previous invasion had occurred in 1915 when Egypt was so busy with other intending invaders, the Turks and Senussi, that scant attention could be paid to locusts, and, moreover, it had not been definitely decided that the migration was certain to take place every ten to fifteen years.

The adult locust is dull red in colour, but when they are sexually mature they turn a vivid yellow. Shortly afterwards egg-laying takes place—the females laying a small cone consisting of 200 eggs or so, glued together with a secretion and buried in the sand at a depth of about two and a half inches. From twenty to forty days later, according to the temperature, the locusts hatch out as minute black grasshoppers, but there is something definitely aggressive and menacing in the shape of their big heads that suggests their future will be a dark one. They change their skins every ten days—the first renewal consisting of a smart black and white stripe, the next change shows a pale green stripe, till finally they are bright red with full-sized wings.

It was thought—possibly the wish was father to the thought—that the female laid only in one place, that the eggs would not hatch unless the sand was damp, and that the young, or ‘hoppers’ as they are called, would mass together in dense

formation after incubation, when they could be destroyed easily. Unfortunately the locusts that invaded Sinai in 1930 were a most undisciplined crowd, as the females travelled right across the province laying eggs whenever they felt inclined, also, although there was no definite proof, it was believed that instead of getting married once as is laid down in the locust laws, most of them forgot their nuptial vows and behaved exactly like film stars. The eggs hatched out a full 100 per cent fertility whatever the condition of the sand, and the 'hoppers' were a disorderly straggling mob that covered enormous areas of desert like a moving black carpet.

The locusts first appeared in Sinai in October, 1929, as full-sized flying insects, sexually immature, and for the next four months they drifted about the Peninsula in vast swarms about five miles wide and fifteen miles long. Unless one has seen a locust swarm it is almost impossible to imagine it, and hopeless to even attempt to guess at the number of millions of insects that are passing overhead or crawling in dense masses on the ground. The expression that the sun is darkened is not an exaggeration, as, though there is no question of an eclipse, it is an actual fact that when a big swarm is flying there is an appreciable shadow across the sun.

Swarms continued to arrive from the east and south and their movements were reported and recorded at the Ministry of Agriculture in Cairo, who kept in close touch with them and knew how many swarms they had to deal with and roughly



Egyptian Army Soldiers spraying a trench with flame guns.





their location. Some swarms had bad luck—one was dodging about on the sea-shore near El Arish when a strong southerly gale sprang up and blew them out to sea, and that was the end of that party. Another swarm was caught the same way in the Red Sea, but quite a third of their number effected the crossing and landed on the other side; whilst a third swarm was blown into the Saharan waste. This particular lot no doubt turned up later in Tripoli, Algiers or Morocco, but so far as Egypt was concerned it had ceased to exist. Luckily the locusts showed a marked preference for the desert and, though a few landed in the Nile Valley, the damage they did was negligible.

The Ministry of Agriculture began to cope with the situation in December, when small parties with flame-guns were sent out to the different posts in Sinai to destroy the swarms. The flame-gun used was practically the same as that employed by the Germans during the war, and consisted of a long pipe at the end of which was a burner rather similar to that of a Primus stove; the other end of the pipe was attached by a tube to a canister of paraffin which was pumped up at intervals and the blazing liquid projected a distance of ten yards. A man carried the canister strapped on his back and worked the flame-thrower, or if sufficient men were available one acted as the ammunition-carrier and the other as the gunner.

The flame-gun was very effective as far as it went; but the flying locust is not entirely a fool, and when a party of men arrived in their midst shooting spurts of fire at them they very naturally took flight and

moved on forty or fifty miles. This meant that all flame-gun work against the flying insect had to be carried out either at night or in the early morning when the locust, chilled with the cold, was too lethargic to fly. Also as the average swarm was usually five miles by ten one can imagine the number of flame-guns required to sweep effectually this area in one night, and another difficulty was the question of the supply of paraffin. The normal consumption of a flame-gun in full blast is sixteen gallons an hour, and the difficulty of maintaining a supply of fuel for a flame-gun party operating 150 miles away from its base was insurmountable with the amount of transport available.

However, the flame-fighting parties kept up a constant warfare, and the swarms were harried all over Sinai till March, when, being sexually mature, the survivors—probably not less than half the original invaders—began to lay eggs. I have commented upon the lack of discipline in the locust world with regard to their method of egg-laying ; but perhaps it is only fair to the insect to admit that possibly this irregularity in depositing eggs all over the desert may have been due to the fact that the insects were being exterminated whenever they settled, and that if they had been left in peace they might have conformed to the rules laid down for egg-laying.

Immediately after the female has laid her eggs she dies, and the simplest method of discovering an egg area is to look for dead insects on the surface of the sand. The males also die off, and one is concerned only with the question of destroying their progeny which are due to appear in forty days ;

but when one thinks of the size of the swarms that one has dealt with and realises that for every insect one has seen there are a hundred in the coming hatch, one feels the necessity for taking the matter seriously.

The next task was the location of every egg area so that it could be watched and dealt with when the first hoppers appeared, and the local Beduin were enlisted for this purpose. A reward of £1 was offered for every place reported which, on investigation, proved to be an egg area and not a figment of the Arab's imagination. This sounded too good to be true, and the Arabs at first were incredulous that a perfectly good guinea was going to be paid to a man for just coming in and mentioning a site where eggs could be found. However, when one or two had received the reward, the news spread like wildfire and every egg area in Sinai was notified in about a week; the only trouble being that most of them were reported about ten times, and it was difficult to decide who had seen it first and should receive the reward. Some Arabs having discovered a site and received the reward promptly told their sons, uncles, brothers, and cousins, who all came in and reported the same place, for the Arab is ever an opportunist and has the quickest brain in the world for locating a weak spot or loophole in any order or law. I have often thought it would be a good idea if, when our Parliament at home are contemplating a new law, they arrange to apply it first in Sinai for a month or so, as, if there should happen to be a flaw in it that has escaped the Solicitor-General, the average Sinai Arab could be trusted to discover it within a few days.



The collection of eggs was also started and small boys and girls brought in sacks of egg-cones, being paid at the rate of twopence-halfpenny for five pounds, and some children earned as much as 2s. a day. One way and another, the situation was well in hand—every egg area had been located and some of them were being gradually exterminated by hand or exposure to the sun by ploughing, which destroyed their fertility, whilst the organisation was complete to kill off the hoppers when they arrived by means of poison bran, trench digging, and flame-guns. At the moment, however, when the first hoppers appeared and work had started on them, a second and far more serious invasion of adult insects from Arabia occurred, one of these swarms being twelve miles by twenty-two, and the other ten miles by eighteen; whilst there were several others of smaller size.

It became obvious at once that the existing organisation could not possibly deal with the situation, and the Egyptian Government without further delay opened a credit of £100,000, bought up every available car and lorry in the country, and detailed the army to take part in fighting the plague. Sinai at once became a centre of great activity, camps sprang up in every direction, huge dumps of petrol, paraffin and poisoned bran were formed, and cars and lorries roared and bumped across the desert in clouds of dust.

The only effective method of dealing with the winged insect is the flame-gun, but the hopper can be disposed of more easily by digging a trench across his path and allowing him to hop into it. This he will do quite cheerfully, and if the trench

has been made properly and he is not hustled he will continue to hop merrily to his death till the trench is full, when a gang of men can trample the bodies into pulp. Unfortunately the locust appears to have what one might call a collective intelligence, and though the individual does not appear to be gifted with much sense, the swarm as a mass are capable of realising when something is menacing them, so that if work takes place in a trench when the locusts are falling into it, or flame-guns are used, the swarm becomes aware of its peril and will turn to a flank to escape. This will necessitate a party detailed to drive back the flank march or the hasty construction of a new trench line. Luckily the Egyptian Army is recruited from the Nile Valley fellah, the finest and most untiring workman in the world. To a hefty man used to digging the stiff black loam of Egypt, the removal of desert sand was child's play, and in a very short time Sinai was seamed with trenches—one of the longest being twelve miles in length.

Over 2,500 soldiers were employed in the Peninsula for two and a half months, together with the Camel Corps and police, the whole of the inhabitants of El Arish, a large number of Arabs, and 500 labourers specially recruited in the Nile Valley; and one cannot speak too highly of the way these men laboured to save the rich lands of the Nile Valley from the plague that threatened it. If the countless millions of hoppers covering Sinai like a black carpet had been allowed to grow to maturity they would have swarmed into Egypt and every green thing in this purely agricultural country would have disappeared in a week or so, and with it the

livelihood of the nation and the chief source of revenue of the Government.

For a very long time the situation appeared to be hopeless—from Kantara to El Arish the railway line and the desert for miles to the south was an undulating black mass, and on two occasions trains from Palestine were held up owing to the wheels being so covered with glutinous slime from crushed bodies that they failed to grip the rails. From El Arish southwards there was another dense mass extending for twenty miles, and in every other part of the Peninsula the situation was nearly as bad. The locusts were fought with trenches, tin barriers, flame-guns and poisoned bran, and for weeks no progress was made, as the insects came hopping relentlessly out of the sandy wastes and every day reports came in of fresh swarms.

The Arabs were then organised into sections of fifty, each man providing his own camel and receiving a wage of £5 per month. These were employed as mobile fighting units, and, under an officer, were sent out to deal with small swarms far away from roads. These sections were issued with kafiyahs (head-dress shawls) of different colours so that they could be recognised as being part of the anti-locust forces, and were christened the Locust Hussars; whilst the foot detachments were dubbed the Royal Locust Fusiliers. It was impossible to find at short notice sufficient trained men to work the flame-guns, so amateurs from the police and army had to be employed, which resulted in a series of minor accidents due to the gunners swinging the nozzles of their guns into the stomachs or backs of their neighbours. Luckily nobody was



seriously injured, but the hospital staff were kept busily employed attending to slight burns, and once had to cope with a batch of poisoned men who had foolishly drunk from a tin that had been used for mixing the arsenic solution with which the bran was impregnated. Luckily every man recovered, and the incident proved to be a blessing in disguise, as previously the officers and officials had foolishly discarded the bran as being useless and innocuous, owing to the fact that it did not kill immediately, and the alarming and immediate effect it had on their workmen increased their confidence in its qualities.

The amount of arsenic a locust would consume in a small portion of bran was quite insufficient to kill him in less than forty-eight hours, nevertheless it proved in the end to be the only real and effective method of dealing with swarms. A darting mass of flame licking up hundreds of thousands of insects is very thrilling and spectacular to watch, but a long line of damp bran impregnated with arsenic, though not so thrilling, is far more deadly, as it was proved that though 10 and even 20 per cent. of a swarm might pass a trench, tin barrier, or line of flame-guns, the mortality of a swarm that had passed a bran line was almost invariably the full 100 per cent., although this might not be apparent for a week. Once this was realised by the various officials in charge of the fighting units the war was over. Train-loads of bran arrived from Cairo, the trenches and flame-guns were discarded, and instead the country was strewn with line upon line of the poison.

The only difficulty about the poison was that



to attract the locust it had to be damp, and, whatever qualities or drawbacks the desert may possess, humidity is certainly not one of them. The locust campaign, however, was remarkable for the fact that one was fighting an enemy who appeared to have endless resources, and this had the effect of inspiring everybody to rack his brain for ingenious methods of overcoming difficulties. If the bran had to be damp and the air was dry, it was obvious that the bait must be watered, so half a dozen lorries were stripped and fitted out with enormous tanks, the flame-guns were thoroughly cleaned and scoured, and parties of men went out spraying the bran twice a day with water.

It was discovered that the hopper locust, though he did not adopt any formation on the march, was influenced by barriers, natural or otherwise. The most effective barrier of this description was the railway line across Sinai. The locusts came streaming north-west or north-east, but immediately they came to the railway line they turned and maintained a steady hopping march on both sides of the metals. There was not the slightest reason why they should not have hopped over it, but for some unexplained reason, possibly the heat radiated by the iron, they seldom if ever did this. The poisoning of the railway line offered no difficulty—a dozen push trollies laden with bran and water patrolled it daily, and in a fortnight a strip 30 yards wide and 130 miles long was black with dead bodies.

On the gravel plateau in Central Sinai the locust stuck rigidly to the wadi beds where there was vegetation and did not take to the open desert. Up every dry water-course, whether it were a 100



Swarm of Locust "hoppers" in a trench.



yards wide or only a foot or so, the stream of locusts travelled, and coping with these was not particularly difficult, as two lorries, one carrying bran and the other water, would deal with ten miles of desert in a day.

The sandy area in the north was a more serious proposition, as the locusts were spread all over this, but sooner or later in their travels they struck the road from El Arish southwards, or from Hassana eastwards, which, by reason of the continuous car traffic, formed barriers they would not cross, and lines of poison on either side of this track cleared up the situation eventually.

After two months of hopeless work when, despite the countless millions destroyed daily, the situation continued to get steadily worse, daylight began to appear. A report came in one morning that the Magdaba area was clear and not a living locust in sight. Previously every message from outside had been to the effect that the conditions were infinitely worse and that more men, guns, paraffin, &c., were urgently required, the demands usually being far in excess of anything that could be supplied. The following day similar reports were received from different quarters, and in a week, except for one or two minor areas, the war was over, and the troops, burned black by the sun, scarred with burns, and their clothing in shreds, came marching back to barracks.

The only difference between real and locust warfare is that in the first the enemy can and very often does give back as good as he gets, and this is unpleasant; but the hardships and fatigue are much the same. In actual warfare there are lucid



intervals when troops can get some rest and refit, but when the locust is the enemy there is no rest, and if one slackens up for even an hour a swarm, capable of destroying a thousand acres, will pass the barrier into country where they cannot be fought.

Soldiers of the old school may hold the view that employment of troops in civil work is detrimental to military discipline and training, but without the help rendered by the Egyptian Army the locust campaign would have been a failure and Egypt would have been devastated. Moreover, the time the troops spent in the desert was not wasted by any means, as it gave the officers the opportunity that they do not get otherwise of living actually amongst their men and working with them. The officer returned from the desert with a very healthy respect and admiration for the private soldier, and this feeling was reciprocated by the men, who had seen their officers black with paraffin smoke working with flame-guns or toiling in the trenches. Also the troops got a very thorough experience of the desert and its drawbacks—lack of water, burning heat and heavy sand. As Egypt consists of a narrow ribbon of cultivation surrounded by sand, any operations it may have to perform in future wars will of necessity be in the desert, and therefore actual experience of campaigning in the terrain in which one day they may have to manœuvre was of the greatest value.

Despite the fact that the Egyptian lives in the centre of a vast desert, not one man in a thousand has had any actual experience of it, and, though the Arab will travel the whole day on one cup of

water, the Egyptian fellah when surrounded by sand will consume several gallons, thus increasing his thirst and weakening his powers of resistance. The first thing that troops operating in deserts have to learn is that it is only a matter of training to march the whole day on one water-bottle, and also that, owing to the difficulties of transport, the supply cannot be increased. It was hard enough to teach British troops this during the Sinai campaign in 1915-16, and still harder to make Egyptians—the heaviest water-drinkers in the world—grasp it.

So far as the Arabs of Sinai and the inhabitants of El Arish were concerned, the locust campaign was a blessing in disguise. The damage done to their crops by the insect was very slight, as the hopper pest arrived just after the harvest of the winter crops and too early to damage the summer crops. A few fig-trees were stripped of leaves and some date-palms damaged, but in compensation for this every man in Sinai who wanted work was employed for three months, and every camel was engaged in transport work. In addition to this the villages were full of officials and soldiery bringing money into the Peninsula, so that Sinai sincerely hopes there will be a similar plague every year; but this view is not shared by the Egyptian Government, who expended over £200,000. However, as the crops of Egypt are worth many millions of pounds, and as the campaign was a complete success and the locusts utterly destroyed before they reached the Nile Valley, the sum expended may be regarded as a very good investment.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## QUAIL NETTING.

"And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, . . ."—EXODUS xvi. 13.

It would be an unfortunate habit to adopt if at meal times we paused to consider the sufferings of the animals or birds whose flesh goes to provide the foods on the menu. In the case of ordinary meat and poultry one realises that the slaughtering has been carried out in the most humane method possible, and with game one is conscious of the fact that the sportsman of to-day is scrupulously particular about the retrieving of wounded birds, and, moreover, that the gun who systematically 'hits too far behind' or takes long shots very soon becomes ostracised.

The quail, however, that provides such a dainty morsel in the autumn and winter comes under an entirely different category, as he is not a native of England, and the average man happily knows nothing of the sufferings the unfortunate little bird has undergone before he appears on the table 'en aspic.' Were people generally aware of this, only the most hardened gourmet would encourage the iniquitous trade by ordering a quail at any meal.

The quail, unfortunately for himself, is a migratory bird, and it is on his annual migration from his summer to his winter haunts that he lays himself open to capture. He breeds and spends the summer in the cornfields of Southern Russia, Roumania and Hungary, and then, when the young birds are full grown at the end of August, he begins his flight towards Africa. The migration starts during the last few days of August, and continues throughout September till about the middle of October.

In the past birds used to cross the Mediterranean and land on the coast from Morocco to Palestine, but the relentless way in which they have been netted and persecuted has practically exterminated them as far as the western part of the Mediterranean is concerned, and they now only arrive in great numbers on the Egyptian coasts. Here, with the idea of preserving the quail, the Government have wisely made regulations which do not prevent the Arabs from making a livelihood, but which at the same time ensure that a certain proportion of birds pass through to propagate their species. But for these laws, which have now been in force some years, it is probable that the quail would by now be practically extinct.

There are no records available as to their flight from Europe and little is known of their movements till they appear on the Egyptian coast. This invariably happens immediately after dawn, and apparently the quail, obeying some instinct, arrange their flight so that their arrival on the opposite side of the Mediterranean coincides with the dawn. They apparently fly at a great height, as normally



they are not seen in flights from passing ships; though, of course, odd individuals who have fallen out of the main body land on vessels, and any ship arriving at Port Said during the months in question will have several quails on board as stowaways.

During September there are frequent thunderstorms in the Mediterranean, accompanied by torrential downpours, and occasionally ships pass through masses of drowned quail who apparently have been drenched by the rain and unable to maintain their flight.

The Egyptian Arab employs two methods of catching quail—*i.e.*, the big trammel-net and the small hand-net. The big net is stretched between poles 12 feet high and is a trammel made of very fine thread. For the benefit of those who do not know what a trammel is like, it is, briefly, a small mesh net stretched in front of a large mesh. The small mesh is about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch and the large mesh about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  foot, and the quail when he strikes the small mesh net in front carries it through one of the large meshes of the net behind and finds himself enclosed in a sort of bag that hangs down and prevents him from escaping.

The small hand-net is about a yard square and is used in much the same way as ferreters employ a net for rabbits. The quail when he lands is so completely exhausted that he staggers into the first bit of cover he sees and remains there for some hours, sometimes a whole day, resting. He invariably enters this cover—*i.e.*, a small bush of desert scrub, from the shore-side and goes out to the south to continue his flight. The Arabs, there-

fore, adopt the simple expedient of putting small nets round the south side of every scrub bush, and when scrub does not exist make a series of tiny hides of coarse grass open to the north and south. The quail does not appear to be overburdened with brains, and he blandly walks into these hides to rest and when he departs finds himself hopelessly entangled in the net on the other side. If the quail could be taught to leave by the door by which he entered some hundreds of thousands would save their lives.

The big trammel-nets, however, account for far more. Erected as they are in the open desert they are, of course, quite conspicuous, but the birds invariably arrive in the uncertain light just after dawn, and, moreover, are so exhausted that probably they have not the strength to avoid it. Men, women and children are in attendance, passing up and down the nets, and immediately a bird is caught he is carefully removed and placed in a long shallow crate made of date-palm cane. The bird has not room to stand upright, but this, though cruel, is done with an object, as the quail is the most pugnacious bird in the world, and, however exhausted or frightened he may be, he is always ready for a fight. If the birds could move freely they would, five minutes after they had quenched their thirst and filled their crops, indulge in a series of fights to the death, which would seriously reduce the profits of the quail catchers.

The flight lasts about an hour and a half, and the birds arrive in bunches of twenty or thirty. Roughly half miss the net and scatter into the

desert, but the remainder flutter helplessly in the trammel till removed. Odd birds continue to be caught throughout the day, but the greater part of the haul is made during the two hours following the dawn. The Egyptian regulations decree that no net is to be erected within 500 yards of the shore in Sinai and 1,000 yards of the shore in the Western Desert; that every kilometre there is to be a gap of 100 yards in which no nets are erected, and netting is absolutely prohibited on a 25-mile stretch immediately to the east of Port Said. These regulations, which are strictly enforced, will prevent the complete extermination of the quail. In the past nets used to be erected within a yard or so of the sea, and the quail, dropping to within a few feet of the ground at the welcome sight of land, almost invariably was caught, and the number that escaped was probably less than 10 per cent.

These regulations, incidentally, are not popular with the Arab, who firmly believes that Allah brings the quail up out of the sea for his own special benefit. It has been laboriously explained to him that the quail, like every other bird, lays eggs and hatches out young, and therefore a certain number must be allowed to pass to provide stock for next year, but the Arab smiles the smile of the unconvinced—he knows better.

Immediately the quail are caught they are fed on dourra (millet) and given water. Captivity apparently does not affect their appetites, for they feed and drink voraciously, and, provided they are kept in the dark except at meal-times and not



allowed to fight, they will continue to eat heartily for two months or more and get extraordinarily fat. When the quail catchers have obtained enough birds for a load the crates are packed on a camel which takes them in to the nearest station. Here they are usually sold by the quail catchers to the middleman, who transfers them to long flat boxes with a canvas roof so that they cannot damage their heads when fluttering upwards. These boxes have food and water troughs in front, and a man travels with them in the truck to keep them supplied with food and water. At Port Said they are sold to another middleman, who ships them across the Mediterranean by steamer to Marseilles, Genoa, Venice and Athens, and ultimately some of the unfortunate little victims arrive in London, where their value is considerably more than it was in the desert of Egypt, as the highest price the Arab obtains is  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pair.

The quail returns to Europe in February and March and apparently travels through Egypt in a leisurely manner, feeding on the corn, which is then ripe. A certain number are shot by Cairo sportsmen, but as shooting quail in the fields of the Nile Valley, which are always filled with the entire human and animal population of Egypt, means peppering some unfortunate cultivator or his donkey with every other shot, the sport is not particularly popular. The birds, moreover, are not in good condition, and unless the quail is exceedingly fat he is not a particularly attractive article of diet. At this time of the year the birds are already paired off ready for their matrimonial duties in South



Europe, and if one quail is flushed another will almost immediately arise from the same spot.

Arab boys in the desert account for a certain number during this migration by working in pairs and employing a small net stretched between four long lines. They mark down a bird in a small scrub bush, and at this they are uncannily clever; then, walking up with the net suspended between them, they drop the snare neatly over the bush. Quail caught this way, however, are for their own consumption, and luckily no attempt is made to catch the birds for export on the return migration.

It is known from the Book of Exodus that quail were plentiful in Egypt 3,500 years ago, as the Israelites were able to catch the birds that dropped exhausted in their camp in such numbers that the whole host were afterwards afflicted by an epidemic, as the quail when fat is not a diet to over-indulge in. Whether their numbers have been reduced since those days it is impossible to say, but, considering it is no unusual thing for 50,000 unfortunate little victims to be exported in one day from Sinai alone, it would appear that, thanks to the Egyptian Government's wise precautions, the day of their extinction is not yet. One wonders, however, if there is any point in preserving a bird solely for the benefit of those gourmets who connive at their wholesale slaughter for the sake of what is after all a quite unnecessary luxury.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE AGRICULTURAL SHOW.

"And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."—ISAIAH XXXV. I.

THE Arishy cultivator is a most conservative individual, and though he loudly proclaims his inability to make a living out of the poor soil of Sinai, he is loath to change his methods and regards anything new with rooted suspicion. As for the Arab, he is so thoroughly satisfied with the system employed by his ancestors a thousand years ago that it is absolutely hopeless to try to get him interested in a new vegetable or seed, or any change that savours of modernity.

With the best intentions in the world, Inspectors of Agriculture have spent days of their time explaining better methods of ploughing, artificial manures and imported seeds, but the Arishy smiles the smile of the unconvinced, and, though he is politely interested, he promptly returns to his old methods immediately the Inspector has departed. Apparently the Arishy in the past has led such a hard life, has been preyed upon by all and sundry, and has been let down again and again by professing friends, that it is impossible for him to realise that anyone would try to help him without some ulterior and sordid motive. He possibly thinks there must

be a catch somewhere, and if these new methods prove a success the Government will take his land from him, for incidentally every Arishy title-deed is a very shaky one.

Colonel Parker, when Governor of Sinai, hearing the people complaining of the lack of shade in the town, procured some thousands of eucalyptus trees and presented two or three to every inhabitant, telling them to plant them in their yards and water them well. Instead of being thanked, the recipients complained bitterly; they said their yards were not big enough, that they could not provide the water, and they had no time to devote to forestry. The trees, however, were issued, and with one or two exceptions were all allowed to die during the first year. A year or so later, when I was sub-Governor to Parker, I had the same idea, and he agreed with me that it was a good one, but that to offer them freely would be fatal. He told me to keep the trees in their pots for a while, wait till somebody asked for some, and then give him two or three very grudgingly under a pledge of secrecy.

I took his advice, and in a few days' time an inhabitant came and asked for twenty trees to plant round his well. I pretended to be very indignant, and said the Government had not procured trees to be wasted on the Arishia, but as a great favour, if he promised not to tell a soul, I would give him a dozen secretly. The plot worked marvellously; in a few days the whole of the trees had been distributed to clamouring applicants, and someone with large ideas went into the garden by

night and stole twenty. All these trees were tended most carefully, and the town is now moderately well shaded, whilst the Arishy gets a vast amount of satisfaction out of it as he has got that pleasant feeling of having wangled the trees by backdoor methods.

The same thing was done with tomatoes—the Arishy tomato used to be a miserable little thing the size of a pigeon's egg and as wrinkled as a crone. Good quality seed was issued to the people but one never saw any result, as apparently the plants were suspect and were allowed to die. I had some very fine tomatoes of Toogood's best strain in my garden, and one day I was asked for two or three for seed purposes. I adopted the same methods as with the trees, and instructed my old gardener that, if he were approached, he was to give them away secretly, and pretend that he would get into very severe trouble if it were found out. He entered into the spirit of the business and used to report to me every day the number he had disposed of to people who had slunk up under cover of the wall with the air of conspirators. The result is that the indigenous Arishy tomato is now extinct and every garden along the north coast of Sinai produces Toogood's Superb. We are now trying to replace the rank little carrot of Sinai by a reliable farm strain by the same methods, and Nasr, the gardener, says it will help things on if I issue a Province Order that the growing of carrots from this selected strain is strictly prohibited. The amusing part of the whole business is that Nasr himself is an Arishy, but nevertheless takes the



greatest pleasure in hoodwinking his own neighbours.

The Arab does not scorn vegetables, as he is quite willing to eat them in any quantity if available ; but he regards a garden as a bond that ties a man down to one spot, and a troublesome thing as it has to be fenced to keep off straying camels and goats, and must also be watered and weeded. One way and another, it is not worth the candle, and if a man values his freedom he must cut out gardens from his life. The only Arab I ever met with any idea of gardening was a funny little snipe of a man who owned a small patch of land in Wadi Gedeirat, which is irrigated by a stream. I gave him a little maize seed, which is not a normal Sinai product, and to his astonishment he grew on about half an acre enough corn to keep him for the winter. Maize flour is rather a delicacy with the Arabs, as it is far pleasanter than barley, their staple product, and incidentally a little goes a long way. The following year I found he had acquired another acre of land, which he had fenced with barbed wire from old redoubts, and that there were half a dozen small oleander trees growing along the water channel. I asked who had planted these, as they are not indigenous to Sinai, and the little Arab admitted tremblingly that he had done so.

“ But why ? ” I asked ; “ they don’t give fruit and they have no value.”

He admitted that he knew this, but he had seen them growing in a wadi in Trans-Jordan and he had brought back some of the seeds, as they were beautiful and smelt sweetly. One has only to know the

very materialistic outlook of the average Sinai Arab to imagine my astonishment. The small man was there and then appointed to the vacant post of watchman to the spring, and was presented with a large number of fruit and olive trees to plant in the garden. So far everything is going well, but I am wondering whether his Beduin instincts will be too strong for him, and one day he will wake up to the fact that he has sold his birthright as a free nomad for a mess of pottage and will steal silently away for a year or more.

With a view to generally promoting better agriculture and improving the strain of the animals in Sinai, the idea was conceived of holding a show on precisely the same lines as the village shows that are held in every part of England. It was feared at first that the Arab and Arishy lacked the competitive spirit necessary to make the show a success, but these fears were quite groundless—the only trouble being that many of them possessed the competitive spirit in too marked a degree to make judging an easy or pleasant matter. With the idea of giving as many people as possible an opportunity of winning a prize, there were classes for everything that Sinai produces in the way of animals, agricultural products and handicrafts. Also there were the usual classes for horses, mares, camels, she-camels, goats, cows, donkeys, turkeys, chickens, ducks, vegetables, basket-work, needle-work, carpets, &c., &c., with side-shows of various descriptions.

The camel class was chiefly remarkable for the fact that a young and keen Egyptian officer, with

a considerable insight into secret service work, managed to induce all the well-known hashish smugglers who were not in prison to show their camels. As a hashish smuggler relies on the speed of his camel to escape the police and Camel Corps patrols, and as the trade is a lucrative one, some of the finest trotting camels in the Near East were shown, and incidentally the first prize was won by a smuggler—or at least a man who was very strongly suspected of being engaged in the contraband trade. The fact that he was caught red-handed about three months after the show was conclusive proof that the suspicions were not in any way unfounded.

The natives appeared to be under the impression that they would enhance the chances of their exhibits if they decorated them as much as possible. It did not make very much difference to the judging if a camel or horse were covered with strings of coloured beads and tinsel, but the judge, a senior officer of the Egyptian Veterinary Service, flatly refused to look at sheep and goats dressed up in coats and trousers till they had had their nether garments removed, and was almost reduced to hysterics at the appearance of a cock turkey painted scarlet and a cockerel with gold ear-rings pierced through his wattles. Perhaps the most astounding exhibit—that really deserved a special prize—was a sky-blue broody hen with twelve chicks of assorted colourings. The judge was horrified, but his feelings in the matter were nothing compared to those of the hen, and I shall never forget the wild anguished



look in her eye as she watched her kaleidoscopic family chirping around her. She must have been under the impression that she had looked upon the barley when it was not only red but rainbow-hued.

The fish exhibit was remarkable for the entry of a nine-foot shark, the owner of which was most incensed that he failed to win, as, not being blessed with palate, he could not see that his shark was any less edible than the dish of soles that won first prize—in any case it was far larger.

An amusing side-show put on by an Arab family consisted of a corn-mill and bakery on camel-back. A woman seated on a camel ground corn in a small hand-mill and passed the flour to two other women on a second camel, who kneaded the flour and baked it on an open brazier of charcoal fixed on the saddle. The remainder of the family, dressed as beggars, fought for the loaves which the women threw to them.

There was a large number of clowns present, but both their costumes and repertoires were so Rabelaisian that the turns had to be severely censored by an officer hurriedly appointed to keep the moral tone at the right height.

The vegetable exhibits were excellent and the class most satisfactory, though there was one enterprising individual who possessed no garden at all, but who had provided a first-class selection that had arrived from Cairo by train the morning of the show. He made no secret of the fact, and is still wondering why, considering the quality of his



vegetables, he did not win the first prize. My old gardener, Nasr, entered into the spirit of the thing with avidity, and though he had had absolutely no previous experience of agricultural shows he knew by instinct exactly what a real gardener should do—he flatly refused to allow the servants to take a vegetable from the garden for three weeks previous to the exhibition, on the plea that they were wanted for his exhibit. The most efficient gardener in England could not do better than that.

The day closed with an open-air cinema which gave the Beduins of Sinai their first experience of a film. They first took up their positions at the back of the screen, and were quite satisfied with the picture till they were shown that a better view could be obtained from the front. A film depicting Charlie Chaplin playing with the wrong ball at golf was perhaps not a happy selection for Arabs, who have never heard of the game, but they thoroughly appreciated the kick that Charlie administered to his opponent as he was addressing the ball. The next film was a cowboy one with a dishonest factor trying to buy up a ranch at a very low price, he having inside information that there was oil on it. I am afraid the Arabs' sympathies were entirely with the villain, as a smart deal of this description appealed to their business instincts, and they were genuinely distressed when the cowboy hero, after riding over rough country as only a film cowboy can, short-headed the bad man at the estate office. The close-up of the cowboy

embracing the heroine at the end of the film struck a happy note, and they knew by instinct what was the correct thing to do—there was a chorus of loud “ Ah’s ” and kissing noises, and no London film audience could have done greater justice to the occasion.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE MURDER OF THE BASH SHAWISH.

“What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”—GENESIS iv. 10.

IN Sinai murders are classified and come under two headings—*i.e.*, friendly family or inter-tribal assassinations, and vicious murders committed with an object in view. It must not be supposed that murder cases are more common in Sinai than in any other part of the world, for as a matter of fact statistics prove that, despite its nomad population, it is singularly free from crimes of violence. Nevertheless, murders occur in the best regulated communities, and when dealing with the Arab one must bear in mind that there are two degrees in murder—*i.e.*, a killing committed in pursuance of a blood-feud or raid, or a really distasteful business when a man is done to death for his personal belongings or from some other equally sordid point of view.

The Arab holds life cheaply, and is quite capable of killing his enemy on sight, but ruthless murderers who take life for financial gain are as rare in the Arab world as they are in any European country.

In England, and other densely populated countries, the discovery and conviction of murderers is nearly always arrived at by means of

witnesses who have seen the suspected man before or after the crime, but in a sparsely populated desert like Sinai such witnesses are seldom available. Unfortunately for the criminal the sand of the desert testifies against him, and the tracks left by himself and the dead man make detection of crime fairly simple, provided the murder is discovered before they are obliterated by wind.

The village of El Arish was the scene some years ago of a murder which had all the elements of devilish cunning and sheer ruthlessness of an Edgar Wallace story. The tale is not a pleasant one, but as it is an interesting side-light on crime in the East, and is, moreover, a murder that would rank in England as a *cause célèbre*, it is worth recording.

El Arish, in common with all frontier towns, has its smuggling fraternity who make a lucrative if dangerous livelihood by carrying contraband across the border into Egypt. The most attractive commodities are narcotics, as, being prohibited, they offer a far greater profit than ordinary merchandise, and the drug most in favour is hashish, a product of the hemp, which finds a ready market in Egypt, and which incidentally is manufactured in Syria and Anatolia.

To combat this smuggling the local Governorate had appointed a certain Bash Shawish (colour-sergeant), El Far of the Sinai Police, to act as secret service agent, and for the first six months after his appointment several captures of hashish and tobacco were made. It was generally known in the village that the Bash Shawish was not *persona*



*grata* on this account, and the fact that he was by race a Neklawi, an inhabitant of Nekhl in the centre of Sinai, did not add to his popularity.

Smuggling for the time being appeared to be nipped in the bud, till one morning a telephone message was received at El Arish that the Kantara-Ludd express, which passes through El Arish at 3 A.M., had run over a man two kilometres west of the station. Accidents of this description are not uncommon in Sinai, for the Arab is at least a thousand years behind the times, and the railway being a product of the war he has not yet quite grasped the fact that the track is a dangerous highway to use. In accordance with Arab custom, he on cold nights wraps up his head with many folds of his kafiya, leaving the rest of his body exposed, and blunders on deaf to the world, to be cut to pieces by the train.

The Mamur (Egyptian police officer) and the Government doctor, therefore, went to the place where the accident had occurred and found a body considerably mutilated, for it had first been run over by the goods train from Ludd to Kantara and afterwards by the up-express. The right leg was completely severed and there was a huge wound in the back of the head. The face was not recognisable, and it was not till they were examining the papers in his wallet that they realised the body was that of Bash Shawish El Far.

The Egyptian police officer occasionally exhibits a failing not altogether unknown at Scotland Yard—that is to say, when he is faced with an accident or a crime he immediately jumps to a conclusion

as to its cause, and leaves no stone unturned in order to prove his surmise to be correct. In this case the Mamur at once decided in his own mind exactly what had happened—the Bash Shawish frequently went down at midnight to the station in plain clothes to inspect the goods train, and on this occasion, having made his inspection, he rode on the train to the place of the accident where he tried to jump off to take a short-cut up to the village, and his foot slipping, he had fallen between the trucks.

This seemed to be a more or less feasible explanation, except that the 'short-cut' to the village from the place where the body was found was about four kilometres across the sand, whereas the road from the station was two kilometres on a hard road. Also there was the rather suspicious fact that, although he was a man who usually carried from £15 to £20 in his purse, there was no money at all found on him, and this, added to the very persistent rumours that there had been foul play, made things look suspicious. Then the news was telephoned through from Kantara that blood and hair had been found on the engine of the goods train, completely upsetting the theory that the unfortunate man had ridden on the train and fallen between the trucks. The Mamur, however, was quite unshaken in his theory, and held the view that the Bash Shawish, having inspected the goods train at El Arish station, had walked along the line to take the 'short-cut'—*i.e.*, six kilometres on two sides of a triangle, instead of two—and had been knocked down by the train. It was a little difficult

to understand how a man used to railways would be such a fool as to be knocked down by the train he had just inspected, but the doctor having certified most emphatically that all wounds were caused prior to death, and a Sudanese tracker taken to the place of the accident having found nothing suspicious, the affair was a complete mystery till the Bash Shawish's two sons, who had been out on patrol, arrived back in El Arish.

They had received the news of the death of their father when they were eighty miles away, and, riding their camels for eighteen hours at a stretch, had reached El Arish in an exhausted condition on the evening of the second day after the discovery. They were two lean well-set-up lads with the long keen Arab face and dark deep-set eyes, and from the moment of their arrival they were convinced that there had been foul play. They spent that night making inquiries as to their father's whereabouts on the fatal evening, and at the first streak of dawn were out on the stretch of sand-dunes that lay between the village of El Arish and the place where the body was found.

Every Arab is a tracker by instinct, and the vague marks left on the sand by passers-by have no secrets from him. He can tell roughly at what hour the tracks were made, the age and condition of a camel by his footprints, and many of them will not only bear the tracks in mind for several days, but at once recognise them if shown several hundred to pick from.

In two hours' time one of the sons came racing into the office in a most excited condition, shouting,



“My father was murdered in the village and his body carried to the line. There is a blood trail on the sand-dunes.” Immediately the police officers, a squad of police and six trackers set out from the village, the whole population turning out to watch them, for the news that interesting developments had taken place had spread like lightning. A mile and a half away some figures were seen on the sand-dunes racing about and behaving in a most excited manner. They were the relatives of the colour-sergeant and his other son in such a demented state that they had to be put under restraint to allow the trackers to get to work.

The first blood-spot discovered was on the churned-up sandy path leading from the village to some gardens by the railway close to the spot where the body had been found. The path was a mass of tracks and stained by innumerable camel and goat droppings, but the spot indicated was a dull terra-cotta colour. The doctor scraped off the upper surface, and beneath was a coagulated lump of sand about half an inch in diameter and a dull red in colour—undoubtedly blood, but whether it was human or camel remained to be seen. The spots occurred the whole way down to the line—sometimes a mark every yard and occasionally stretches of fifty yards or so where no spots were discovered.

The last track was discovered some fifty yards to the west of the place where the body was found, and the police were still somewhat sceptical as to whether they were on a real clue or not, for two reasons—one was that, presuming the body had been brought to the line by camel, it was only



reasonable to expect that it would be placed on the metals at the exact spot where it had been unloaded instead of being carried up the line some fifty yards to the east ; also the blood on the sand between the metals was still a bright scarlet and that on the blood trail was either terra cotta or dull red. The first doubt, however, was after a moment's consideration explained—the track down which the blood trail was found was a much-used one, and it was just possible that a man going to work in his garden or a fisherman might pass that way soon after midnight and discover the body before the trains had passed ; therefore to guard against all eventualities of this description it would be necessary to put the body at least fifty yards from the place where the track crossed the line.

With regard to the difference in colour of the blood, the doctor was somewhat inconclusive when asked if the blood from, say, a contused wound on the head would be of a darker hue than that from an artery in the leg. Despite the absence of a ruling by an expert, however, it seemed safe to assume that arterial blood would be of a lighter shade.

Another disturbing factor was that a really excellent Sudanese tracker had been used on the day of the discovery, who had searched the sand for a considerable distance but had found nothing on this occasion. It rather appeared that the blood trail must be more recent, and possibly that of a wounded camel, but the tracker himself cleared up this difficulty. On the night before the body was found there had been a slight sand-storm and

all tracks were covered with a film of sand, particularly the blood-spots, so that they were not visible ; but on the following night there had been heavy rain and the moisture had brought the blood-stains through the covering of sand so that they were apparent on the surface. This was a perfectly feasible explanation, and an exhaustive search on the other side of the railway having revealed no further blood spots, the party returned to the place where the first track had been found to try and link them up with the village.

This was not so easy as there had been a considerable amount of traffic on the path during the last two days, but the trackers' eyes were by this time accustomed to the dull terra-cotta stain denoting a blood spot, and gradually they worked their way towards the western end of the village, where a dense crowd had gathered to watch the proceedings.

The senior police officer or Mamur, after following the tracks to the railway, had returned along the line by trolley to the station, and on the way received information from one of the police that caused him on arrival to telephone up to his office ordering the arrest of five people, and three of them were arrested from the crowd watching the trackers, who had by now worked their way close to the village.

Incidentally this episode would have made a first-class scene for a film—the murderers watching the trackers relentlessly working along the trail across the sand-dunes towards the village, and every moment drawing nearer to the scene of the

crime. One can imagine the terror of the criminals and their indecision as to whether it would be wiser to make a run for it or to remain in the hope that the trackers would lose the trail in the village.

Of the other two wanted persons, one, a woman called Honom, was arrested by the police in her house at the moment when the trackers arrived, having followed the blood spots to the door of her yard. The yard in question was about twenty metres square surrounded by a high mud-brick wall against which were built seven or eight small rooms, in the style of architecture favoured by the Arishia. It is the custom with the poorer class for an entire family to have a common yard in which they store their firewood and house their camels, goats and chickens ; and each member occupies a small room in which he and his family live. In the yard in question was the room in which Honom lived, and three of the other rooms were occupied by four distant cousins of hers, all of whom were women with the exception of a decrepit old blind man, Hassan.

The police, with laudable thoroughness, removed everybody to the police station, for the red-hot evidence one obtains immediately after an arrest, when the witnesses are somewhat rattled, is generally the truth, and usually bears no resemblance to the evidence obtained later which is the result of mature consideration. The police then moved on to arrest Wassila, the mother of Honom, who lived close by, while the search-party remained to make a careful inspection of the room.

The room was about three yards by four, fur-



nished with a bed which was somewhat out of keeping with its sordid surroundings, a small chair and a lamp on a bracket ; and the first thing that struck one on entering was a mark on the mud floor where the soil had been scraped away to the depth of an inch. An ordinary rush mat had a dull red stain on it, and though there were several places on the walls where marks had been scraped off, the trackers found ten or twelve tiny splashes of blood, while a large sack with a huge blood-stain in one corner was found hidden in the yard.

The camel occupies a most important position in the East, particularly in desert areas, and there is seldom a criminal case in which he does not figure, either as a principal, having been stolen, or as a very important though silent witness. In this case it was already obvious that the body of the murdered man had been carried to the railway line four kilometres away, and it was equally obvious that a camel must have been used for the purpose. Once again the Mamur received special information, and two camel police were sent off post-haste to bring in the camel of one Saad, which was grazing in the desert some miles away. On being produced some blood-stains were found on its hair, also some dark spots on the cloth of the saddle, and a large scraped patch on the wood frame.

By this time something like twenty people were under arrest, the suspected parties being Wassila, a woman of fifty ; Honom, her daughter ; Skander, her son ; Merai, her nephew ; Bassouni, her son-in-law ; and Saad, another son-in-law. Wassila was a well-known bad character—the head of a big



smuggling gang, keeper of a disorderly house, and leader of all the thieves in the Province; but though she had been a prime mover in almost every crime during the previous fifteen years, she had only been convicted three times. Honom was suspected of being loose in her morals, but beyond that there was nothing against her. Skander was known to be a smuggler, Merai also was a smuggler, and had been convicted of robbery with violence, whilst there was nothing against Bassouni and Saad, except one conviction against the former for a solitary smuggling episode. Blood-spots were found on the turbans of Skander and Merai, whilst the latter was wearing a white gown which had recently been very thoroughly washed, an unusual and suspicious occurrence.

The preliminary inquiry was already in full swing, and two important statements had been made by women who lived in the same yard as Honom, one saying that at 10 P.M. on the night of the murder she had seen Skander and Merai enter the house of Honom; and the other that she had heard the noise of a struggle that lasted half an hour, after which she heard a camel brought into the yard and made to kneel, and the voice of Skander saying, "Come on, Bassouni." Then the old blind man, Hassan, stated that the following morning Wassila had come into the yard and warned the two women in question not to say a word if they valued their lives.

The next witness examined was the mother of Bassouni, and she very reluctantly stated that at about 12 o'clock on the night in question her son

had awakened her and told her to go and see what was happening in the room of Honom. She went and peeped through a hole in the door and saw the Bash Shawish being killed by Merai, Skander and the woman Wassila.

Saad, the owner of the camel, who, unlike the others, looked an honest man, said that in the middle of the night he heard Skander call out and ask if he could have the loan of his camel to bring some goods from the station. He was in bed at the time, so shouted that he had no objection, and he heard the camel go out and found it tied up in the yard the following morning. Skander flatly denied this, and said that he had borrowed the camel at 7 P.M. and returned it half an hour later. Saad's wife, who incidentally was the daughter of Wassila and sister of Skander, was then called to corroborate either the statement of her husband or brother. Apparently she had been allowed by the police to stand too close to the door of the office whilst the previous evidence was being given, for no sooner had she entered than she volunteered the statement that her brother had taken the camel at 7 P.M. and not at midnight. The evidence was obviously untrue, but was rather interesting proof of the entire lack of affection existing between the average Eastern of that class and his wife. Saad's wife was perfectly ready to swear false evidence that would lead to the conviction of her husband in order to save her brother.

The following day Merai stated that he wished to confess, but his story, which incriminated Skander and Wassila only, was so obviously false that no

attention was paid to it. It, however, reached Skander's ears that a confession had been made and he volunteered to make a statement, an example which was immediately followed by all the other principals. As was expected, the evidence varied in every case, in that the witness was careful to make it clear that he or she took no active part in the killing ; but the stories when pieced together fitted in like a cross-word puzzle, and disclosed the tale of one of the most bloodthirsty and sordid murders that has ever been committed.

It appeared that Wassila was not only the originator of the plot, but had taken an active part in urging the men on, and there seemed to be little doubt that but for her the murder would not have taken place. Generally speaking, women of her class in the East sound a very subdued note, are treated by the men as little better than cattle, and on the whole *are* little better than animals as regards intelligence ; but occasionally one comes across a woman of her type. Gifted with brain far above the average, the determination and strength of character of a superman, the wiles of the serpent, and the cunning of a fox, they are almost invariably an enormous power for evil, and in sheer ruthlessness they put the most hardened criminal to the blush.

Wassila's name was known all over Sinai and Southern Palestine, and there was not a native of the country who was not terrified of her. She was the head of the smuggling gang in El Arish, and as the Bash Shawish was proving an obstacle she decided that he must be removed. She pre-



vailed upon her son, Skander, and her two relatives, Merai and Bassouni, to commit the murder and showed them how easily it could be arranged so as to hoodwink the authorities. In the first place, the murder was to be committed on a night when there was no moon, and afterwards the body could be carried to the railway to be cut up by the train so that it would appear he had been killed by accident. If by any chance this scheme should fail she had a second line of defence. In an effort to undermine his loyalty to the Government, she had connived at and encouraged a liaison between her daughter, Honom, and the Bash Shawish, which had been going on for some months. No doubt the Bash Shawish had been exceedingly foolish to risk his reputation with any member of such a doubtful family, but possibly he had taken full advantage of the situation to obtain exclusive information of the movements of smugglers. On the night in question Wassila had arranged for the Bash Shawish to stay with her daughter, and the important part of the plot was that if by any chance the murder was discovered, it would be easy to plead the unwritten law of Egypt and prove that the crime was committed to avenge the family honour.

At 11 P.M. the three men met in Wassila's house armed with clubs and an axe and went quietly round to Honom's room. The Bash Shawish was lying on a couch talking to Honom when the door burst open and the murderers entered. It appeared that the Bash Shawish made an effort to get out, but was felled by a blow from a club on the jaw.



A desperate struggle then took place, Wassila ramming a piece of cloth into his mouth while the men struck at his head. The Arishia are not made of very stern material, and it seemed that on more than one occasion they wished to cry off, but Wassila urged them on, telling her son to 'finish him off.' The body was then put into a sack and, Skander having fetched Saad's camel, it was placed in a camel-basket, a load of stone being put on the other side to balance it, and transported to the railway line.

At the trial, which took place a month later, the Court was considerably hampered by Honom, in an attempt to save her family, going back on all her previous evidence and flatly denying everything. She broke down after cross-examination, however, and admitted that the whole story was true, even going so far as to say that the murder had taken place in her room in order to make it appear a matter of outraged honour, whereas it was in reality nothing but a sordid murder to remove an obstacle to Wassila's smuggling campaign.

There was some doubt in the mind of the Court as to the exact culpability of Bassouni. It was clearly proved that he was a party to the plot and had actively assisted in the removal of the body, but there was no reliable evidence to prove that he was actually in the room when the Bash Shawish was killed. As a Court in the East has to act impartially and help the defence if it appears necessary, Bassouni's mother, who had stoutly denied her previous story of having been sent to see what was happening in Honom's room, was recalled.

The poor old woman was under the impression that if she denied everything her son might be acquitted, whereas unless she told the truth the Court had no alternative but to find him guilty in the first degree, as it had been proved that he had set out with the murderers just before midnight and was present when the body was loaded on the camel.

She began again by denying everything, but on being cross-examined admitted that at midnight she had gone to the room of Honom and seen the murderers killing the Bash Shawish. When asked why she left her house at that hour and went to Honom's, she refused to reply, and then under cross-examination admitted that her son had awakened her and sent her to look. This appeared to prove what had been in the mind of the Court from the first—namely, that Bassouni had ratted at the very door of Honom's room when the first blows were struck by Merai and Skander, and had run home. Then, wishing to know what had happened, he had sent his mother to look, afterwards returning to assist with the camel.

The Court sentenced Wassila, Merai and Skander to death, and Bassouni, as accessory before and after the fact, to penal servitude for life. The sentences caused a considerable amount of consternation, for, according to Arab custom, murders are atoned for by payment of blood-money, and, although the Arishy is not an Arab, he lives in close proximity to the Beduin, and there was a faint hope among the relatives of the murderers that they might escape with a few years' imprisonment and the payment of a blood-fine.

They were sent off the same afternoon by train to suffer the penalties in Zagazig prison, some hundreds of their relatives assembling at the railway station and singing the death-chant that is sung at funerals. Wassila, brazen to the last, said, "What does it matter? one dies only once. A tightening of the rope around one's neck and all is over." To which one of the men replied, "Hold your peace, woman; you have done enough. You have sent three men to their death."

## APPENDIX.

## CAR ROUTES THROUGH SINAI.

"This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."—ISAIAH XXX. 21.

A FEW years ago, before automobiles reached their present state of efficiency, a motor-car journey in the desert could only be undertaken after a considerable amount of preparation and the provision of spare parts for every emergency, whilst the presence of a first-class mechanic with the party was essential. At the present time the general reliability of cars and the amount of work done by the Egyptian Government in improving tracks and erecting sign-posts has made desert travel a comparatively safe and easy undertaking, so that ordinary motorists who possess a slight knowledge of what is happening under the bonnet may journey into the deserts without hardship or risk.

Apart from the charm of driving through scenery absolutely different from that met with on ordinary roads, and the novelty of having the track to oneself, there is the question of economy to be considered, and the journey to Jerusalem, Petra and other well-known places of interest can now be made far more cheaply by car than by train, with the added attraction of being able to see the surrounding country at leisure. For this reason



I have tabulated the various routes across Sinai, giving the mileage, difficulties to be met with *en route*, and all general information that may be of assistance to travellers.

The maps of Sinai were made before the existence of car roads, and the tracks shown on the various sheets are the old camel routes. Approximately the car roads coincide with the camel tracks, but in places where the country is difficult the car roads make detours, and in others divergences occur to take advantage of any particularly good bit of going. For this reason the mileage shown may not be absolutely correct, as it has been arrived at by speedometers, and speedometers are notoriously inaccurate. The figures given are the averages arrived at by the runs of several different makes of cars, and the error, therefore, should not be more than 4 per cent.

*Cairo to Suez.*—The condition of this road varies from year to year according to the repairs carried out. It is normally a first-class desert highway, but apt to become corrugated by lorry traffic. The time required for doing the journey in comfort is three hours.

(Distance—83 miles. Time—3 hours.)

*Suez to Jerusalem.*—The Canal is crossed at Kubri ferry, five miles north of the town of Suez. From Kubri the road runs south along the Canal bank to Shatt outpost, and then turns due east into the desert. The first six miles of the road were constructed by the British Army during the

war for the maintenance of posts at Bir Murr. After Bir Murr a road of stone or stiff clay, constructed by the Frontiers Administration, is built up over the sand country and winds somewhat to avoid particularly difficult going. It follows roughly the Darb el Haj (Pilgrim route) and mounts to the top of a line of rocky hills about half a mile north of the Mitla Pass, twenty-three miles from Shatt. The greater part of this track is excellent, but from time to time sand patches are blown across the road. These sand patches can be easily negotiated if the driver braces his arms, takes a firm grip of the wheel, and rushes the bad bits at speed, as they are seldom more than ten to fifteen yards in extent.

(Distance—Kubri to Mitla Pass, 23 miles. Time—  
1 hour 10 minutes.)

After the Mitla Pass the road follows the pilgrim track through the Wadi el Haj, and is a well-graded road with culverts in places to carry off water. It is liable to wash-outs after rain, but a careful driver can negotiate these without difficulty. The road is interesting as the rocky hills rise sheer from the valley, and in places one can see the deeply grooved camel tracks made by the pilgrim caravans during the last fifteen hundred years, and also in places there are huge piles of stones thrown by the pilgrims either as a pious act to celebrate another stage of the journey, or as a gesture of execration against Shaitan (Satan) and his afreet. At a certain spot half-way through the Wadi el Haj there are a few acacia trees and this place is reputed

to be occupied by devils, hence the many heaps of stones, which should have assured them of their unpopularity. At the end of the Wadi el Haj the mountains open out and one gets a wonderful view of the great plateau of Central Sinai—a vast gravel plain dotted with flat-topped hills and seamed with wide water courses. The end of the Wadi el Haj is called Sudr Heitan and here the road forks, the left hand one leading to Hassana and the right to Nekhl.

(Distance—Mitla Pass to Sudr Heitan, 16 miles.  
Time—1 hour.)

From the fork the Hassana track leads across the plateau, which is naturally good going, so that little has been done to its upkeep beyond levelling off at wadis. This part of the road is uninteresting, except that one may see an odd gazelle or two and occasionally bustard and hares. If by any chance water should be required on this run, a well—*i.e.*, Bir Themada, exists on the east side of the road about nineteen miles from Sudr Heitan. It is not particularly easy to discover as it lies about half a mile from the road in the Wadi Bruk, and the only distinguishing mark is a small clump of tamarisk bushes. At Hassana there is a police post and a furnished Government rest house which will accommodate four people under moderately comfortable conditions. These rest houses are not provided for the use of travellers, but as the Egyptian Government is interested in the furtherance of desert travel, and as so far the traffic has not assumed sufficient proportions to enable private individuals

to start hotels or rest houses, permission can usually be obtained to stay in them if application is made at the Frontiers Administration Headquarters, War Office, Cairo. A small charge per head is made to cover cost of fuel and washing. No supplies can be obtained at Hassana, but petrol can be purchased and water is plentiful.

(Distance—Sudr Heitan to Hassana, 49 miles.

Time— $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours.)

From Hassana the road is that constructed by the Turkish Army for the invasion of Egypt during the war. The surface is hard but slightly billowy in parts, so that high speeds are impossible. Six miles from Hassana a line of sand-dunes has crossed the road and no human ingenuity can cope with sand-dunes, as they advance at the rate of from ten to thirty yards a year. The track crossing these varies from time to time—sometimes an open space occurs to the south of the road and sometimes to the north. It is necessary to drive along the line looking for an open track of gravel between the dunes, and this will be found without difficulty a matter of half a mile or so from the road. On no account should an attempt be made to drive over a dune—some dunes are quite hard and a car will travel over them at speed, but others have pockets of soft powder sand in which a car will sink to the axles. After travelling seventeen miles a white sugar-loaf hill is passed, and at the foot of this there is a cistern of the Byzantine period carved out of the rock which usually holds rain-water. After this the road runs under Gebel Hellal, which



may or may not be the Mountain of the Law. Another three miles along the road and one comes to Hazira, which consists of a solitary barrack-room built by the Turks—there is a water-hole to the left inside the little gorge that opens into the mountain-side. Ten miles farther on one comes to Dheiga where the Wadi El Arish (the River of Egypt) cuts through the centre of Gebel Hellal. Here the Turks maintained a post, bringing the water in pipes from Wadi Gedeirat nineteen miles away. Close by the dismantled Turkish barracks is a graveyard where it is said over a hundred Turkish soldiers are buried who died of exposure during a night of blizzard in 1916, but no doubt the Arabs, from whom I obtained the information, have greatly exaggerated the numbers. Three miles farther on a road to the left leads to El Arish, but the main track carries on to Kosseima, where a rest house similar to that at Hassana exists. Kosseima is not quite such a desert post as Hassana, for a spring of water enables a grove of eucalyptus and palm trees to exist, and a village shop may—or may not—be able to supply a few eggs, flour, rice and possibly a chicken, but it is as well not to rely on the resources of Kosseima as they vary with the time of year. Petrol can be obtained at Kosseima and water is plentiful. Three miles from Kosseima is the Ain el Gedeirat which is described in another chapter and which is worth a visit. Ten miles to the south is Ain el Kadeis, the accepted Kadish Barnea of the Bible, and this is not worth a visit.

(Distance—Hassana to Kosseima, 46 miles. Time  
—2 hours 15 minutes.)

From Kosseima the old Turkish war road leads to the frontier between Egypt and Palestine, which is three miles west of Beirein. The spot is marked by a cairn of stones; and on the left of the road is the railway constructed by the Turks during the war for the invasion of Egypt, the culverts and bridges of which were destroyed by our Royal Engineers and a force of Imperial Camel Corps, in 1917, to deny its use to the enemy. At Beirein there are several wells, and during the latter part of the Roman occupation of the country there was a Byzantine village surrounded by cultivation. Auja, which is the frontier post of the Palestine Government, was also a Byzantine town, and there are the ruins of a church and monastery and remains of extensive cultivation. Passports are examined at Auja, and travellers here obtain permission to enter Palestine.

(Distance—Kosseima to Auja, 18 miles. Time—45 minutes.)

From Auja the road runs across an uninteresting gravel plateau seamed with wadis, which in the past were terraced to conserve moisture and to collect the rich silt deposited by floods. Fifteen miles from Auja, and to the south of the road, lies the Byzantine town of Esbeita, which is worth a visit if the traveller has time and does not object to driving across rough country. In the past it was obviously a town of some importance; has dams and reservoirs and the ruins of several churches and monasteries. Twenty-five miles from Auja is the police post and mosque of Asluj—a dreary

deserted spot famous only for a wonderful Australian inscription on the wall of a barn—now unfortunately almost indecipherable. This inscription runs: "Madame Kooch has the best girls in Asluj—10 piastres each." As there never was a Madame Kooch, nor any girls of any sort or kind, the inscription must remain as one of those gems of Australian humour too Antipodean to be grasped by the ordinary mind.

The road has a good hard surface, but has become billowy and corrugated so that high speeds are impossible, but there is nothing to cause any delay till one arrives at Beersheba, a straggling red-roofed village of no particular interest beyond the fact that it is always mentioned in the Bible in connection with Dan, and is at the present time the shopping centre for the Arabs of South Palestine and the Wadi Araba. Stores and petrol are obtainable here.

(Distance—Auja to Beersheba, 45 miles. Time—  
2 hours.)

For the first eight miles the road to Jerusalem runs across a huge alluvial plain—a rolling field of corn in the late winter and early spring and a dusty barren spot in summer and early autumn. Then the road enters the Judæan foothills and mounts steadily till one reaches the little hill village of Dahariyeh; from here on the scenery is delightful with the road steadily climbing through the terraced hillsides, while to the east tower the Trans-Jordan mountains on the far side of the Dead Sea. The road is well constructed and an average of

thirty miles an hour can be maintained, despite the hair-pin bends and turns as the track continues to ascend to Hebron. Hebron is a landmark on the journey as it is the first civilised town one meets on the route, and, moreover, one realises that one has left the desert behind and is now in the midst of rich cultivation.

(Distance—Beersheba to Hebron, 32 miles. Time—1 hour 10 minutes.)

From Hebron a first-class metalled road takes one through the outskirts of Bethlehem to Jerusalem.

(Distance—Hebron to Jerusalem, 22 miles. Time—50 minutes.)

(Total distance—Cairo to Jerusalem, 334 miles. Time—14 hours 40 minutes.)

The timing given makes full allowance for rough roads and takes into consideration the question of the comfort of the passengers and damage to the car. The journey could be done in a matter of twelve and a half hours if desired.

*Cairo to El Arish.*—Although the most direct route to El Arish, when one looks at the map, appears to be that leading east from the Canal at Ismailieh, or farther north from Kantara by the railway line, the only possible route is that from Suez *via* the Mitla Pass. The desert for twenty miles east of the Canal is a line of sand-dunes quite impassable for ordinary cars, and though the journey from Ismailieh to Hassana has been accomplished two or three times, it has always been negotiated



by six-wheelers or cars specially constructed to cross sand.

The road to El Arish is the same as that for Jerusalem as far as the junction near Dheiga. It would appear that the more direct route is due north from Hassana, but here again sand-dunes make the track impassable, and the only means of reaching El Arish is by skirting Gebel Hellal on the eastern side.

(Distance—Cairo to Dheiga Junction, 205 miles.  
Time—9 hours.)

Three miles after passing the Dheiga, where the Wadi El Arish flows through Gebel Hellal, there is a sign-post and one follows a road turning to the north to El Arish. Five miles farther on there is a road going east which is merely a short-cut to Kosseima when travelling from El Arish, and there is another road going east two miles beyond this which is a direct track to Auja, fifteen miles away. Both these side roads have excellent surfaces and moderately high speeds can be maintained. The road to El Arish winds round the Dhalfa mountain and then runs westward past Um Shehan and Ruafa, after which it bears north-west to Magdaba. Water can usually be found in a cement dam constructed in the side of Dhalfa mountain, or at the water-holes in the wadi at Ruafa and Abu Awgeila. The Wadi El Arish lies on the left the whole way, and roofless buildings mark the spots where the Turks constructed watering stations for the advance on El Arish. At Magdaba there is a small police post. Water is obtainable

in the wadi close by, but there is no rest house nor village.

(Distance—Dheiga Junction to Magdaba, 23 miles.  
Time—1 hour.)

From Magdaba an excellent track across hard clay leads into El Arish, but the road, though negotiable, is most unpleasant after heavy rain, and cars are forbidden to travel on it when it is in this condition owing to the damage caused by ruts. At El Arish there is a rest house, which is usually occupied by officials and therefore not available for travellers. Petrol can be purchased and all ordinary supplies. Owing to sand-dunes there is no direct road to Rafa, Khan Yunis or Gaza, and the only means of reaching these villages is *via* Auja and Beersheba.

(Distance—Magdaba to El Arish, 22 miles. Time—50 minutes.)

(Total distance—Cairo to El Arish, 250 miles.  
Time—10 hours 50 minutes.)

*Kosseima to Kuntilla.*—This is a very excellent desert road running along the frontier. There is nothing of particular interest on the route, but the country is wild and hilly. At Kuntilla there are Camel Corps barracks and a rest house. Kuntilla stands over two thousand feet above sea-level, and the air is most bracing and invigorating so that it would make an ideal spot for sanatorium or hotel. At Kuntilla water exists, and petrol can be obtained if a request is made in advance.

(Distance—Kosseima to Kuntilla, 59 miles. Time—2 hours 45 minutes.)

*Cairo to Petra.*—This is not a journey to be undertaken without some preparation, and it is definitely not suited for under-powered or heavily built cars, as the passes at Akaba and near Maan have a very steep gradient, whilst the Wadi Ithm in Trans-Jordan is very rough after floods. It is also a journey that should not be undertaken by one car, and, in view of the difficulties, there should be at least three men in the party.

The first stage of the journey is the same as for Jerusalem as far as the Sudr Heitan, where the road forks to Hassana and Nekhl.

(Distance—Cairo to Sudr Heitan, 122 miles.

Time—5 hours 10 minutes.)

At the sign-post take the Nekhl road that runs due east across the plateau. The surface looks excellent, but unfortunately the road runs parallel with the watershed, with the result that there are small water-courses a few inches deep every two or three hundred yards which cause one to run at twenty-five miles an hour instead of fifty. At Nekhl there is a rest house similar to those at Hassana and Kosseima, and arrangements can be made for petrol if desired. No provisions can be obtained here, as, although Nekhl was a village of some size before the war, it has now ceased to exist owing to the divergence of the pilgrim traffic. Water is plentiful but unpleasant, though not harmful to health.

The fort, built by Sultan Selim in the fifteenth century, was blown up during the late war—this

and the big reservoir constructed for the pilgrims is worth a visit.

(Distance—Sudr Heitan to Nekhl, 38 miles.

Time—2 hours.)

From Nekhl to Themed the road is only a desert track which the Frontiers Administration of Egypt only keep clear of obstructions. Fast travelling is impossible, but there are no difficulties to overcome and the surface is hard. Themed is only a police post, and the rest house consists of three unfurnished rooms. Water is plentiful and very good, but no stores can be purchased, nor is petrol available.

(Distance—Nekhl to Themed, 39 miles. Time—2 hours.)

From Themed to Kuntilla the track is very much the same as that between Nekhl and Themed, and no great difficulties will be met with, though the track in parts is rough.

Kuntilla is a police and Camel Corps post of some importance, but there is no village, though simple tinned stores can be obtained at the Government canteen. The rest house is the same as those at Kosseima and Hassana. Water is plentiful and of good quality and petrol can be obtained by previous arrangement.

(Distance—Themed to Kuntilla, 34 miles.

Time—2 hours.)

From Kuntilla to the Ras el Nagb is a fine piece of natural desert on which high speeds can be



maintained. At Ras el Nagb there is a police post only and no rest house or stores are available, also the water supply is uncertain.

(Distance—Kuntilla to Ras el Nagb, 32 miles.

Time—1 hour 15 minutes.)

The pass from the Ras el Nagb is dangerous and rough, and in parts the gradient is one in three with an indifferent surface, though some of the worst places have been tarred. The descent should not be attempted unless the brakes are in perfect order and the driver has every confidence in himself and his car. The traveller must also take into consideration the question of whether he will be able to return or not, as not every make of car has sufficient power to climb this very steep ascent. In any case for the return journey a plentiful supply of water for the radiator should be carried, as most cars boil furiously when negotiating the pass.

The scenery is marvellous, as the high plateau falls away in granite ranges and one sees at one's feet the Gulf of Akaba, an intense blue strip of sea fringed at the northern end with date-palms.

At the bottom of the pass the track crosses the Wadi Masri which is rough and boulder-strewn, and then descends on an easier gradient to the sea-shore. The road then runs close to the sea across a clay pan, but if there has been rain recently this is impassable and one must go north through very bad and rough sand country—or, if the tide is low, it is possible to get on to the sea-shore and run on the damp sand. Both these alternatives are



Coming up the Ras el Nagb or Pass of Akaba.



difficult and not to be undertaken by drivers inexperienced in desert travel.

Akaba is a small fishing village and provides no accommodation. Fish, eggs and chickens can be obtained, but the place is not recommended as a shopping centre. Petrol is sometimes available, but cannot be relied upon.

(Distance—Ras el Nagb to Akaba, 12 miles.  
Time—1 hour 15 minutes.)

From Akaba the road leads up the Wadi Ithm—the Trans-Jordan Government expend a large sum of money on this track, but as it is liable to complete wash-outs by floods its condition cannot be relied upon. High-powered cars with light loads can always travel up it, but unless the road has been recently repaired it is not a journey to be recommended. At the end of the Wadi Ithm the road is excellent and the going the whole way into Maan presents no difficulty. At Maan there is a hotel of sorts, stores and petrol are available, and water is plentiful.

(Distance—Akaba to Maan, 76 miles. Time—4 hours.)

From Maan the road to Petra, or rather the village of Wadi Mousa, is excellent. At Wadi Mousa the cars have to be left as no road exists into Petra. Ponies, mules and donkeys can be hired at Wadi Mousa, and the ride into the city of Petra takes about one hour. Owing to the intense cold and heavy rains that occur in the Trans-Jordan mountains during the latter part of December, January, February and the first part of March,



it is advisable to arrange to visit Petra in the late autumn or early spring.

(Distance—Maan to Wadi Mousa, 18 miles.

Time—45 minutes.)

(Total distance—Cairo to Petra, 371 miles.

Time—19 hours 25 minutes.)

*Cairo to the Monastery of St. Catherine.*—This, like the road to Petra, is not one to be undertaken lightly, as the track is difficult and very rough, and is not suitable for one car only. The Canal is crossed at Kubri, Suez, and the road runs due south through Shatt to the Wells of Moses, where a grove of palm-trees round some pools of water form the typical desert oasis that one has pictured from one's childhood days and seldom sees. It is believed that the Wells of Moses are those struck by him after the crossing of the Red Sea. For the next thirty miles the track is very fair, but it is cut in places by wide wadis where driving is difficult. The road then gets more mountainous till finally one enters the Wadi Tiyeba and runs along the water-course till the cliffs open out on to the Gulf of Suez. The road then swings to the left to the mining village of Abu Zeneima. Here stores can be purchased and petrol is available if previously arranged. Water is not plentiful and can only be obtained by purchase from the Mining Company, who transport it from Suez. Accommodation can sometimes be obtained at the Government rest house, but this cannot be relied upon.

(Distance—Kubri to Abu Zeneima, 75 miles.

Time—4 hours.)

From Abu Zeneima the road runs by the side of the company's railway for five miles and then turns right by the sea-shore, till one arrives at a junction marked by a sign-post at Kilo. 142. The direct road to the Monastery goes off here to the left *via* the Wadis Sidri and Mukattab, but as these wadis are swept by heavy floods it is advisable to make certain before leaving Cairo if they are negotiable. If they are not possible one must take the road to Tor, go up the Wadi Feiran for three miles, and then, on arriving at the second junction—Kilo. 173—take the easterly track to the Monastery, leaving the Tor road on one's left. If the Wadi Sidri track is negotiable the road leads up a winding wadi with granite cliffs on either side, and about thirty miles from Abu Zeneima there will be found on the granite blocks that have fallen into the water-course the famous Sinaitic writings which are mentioned in another chapter. For roughly one mile every block of granite on the right side of the wadi is covered with these inscriptions. At the top of the wadi there is a difficult and rough pass, and the road then winds down to the Wadi Feiran.

(Distance—Abu Zeneima to Wadi Feiran, 31 miles. Time—2 hours 15 minutes.)

If the Wadi Sidri road is not taken, and the route up the whole length of the Wadi Feiran is followed, the distance is nine miles more.

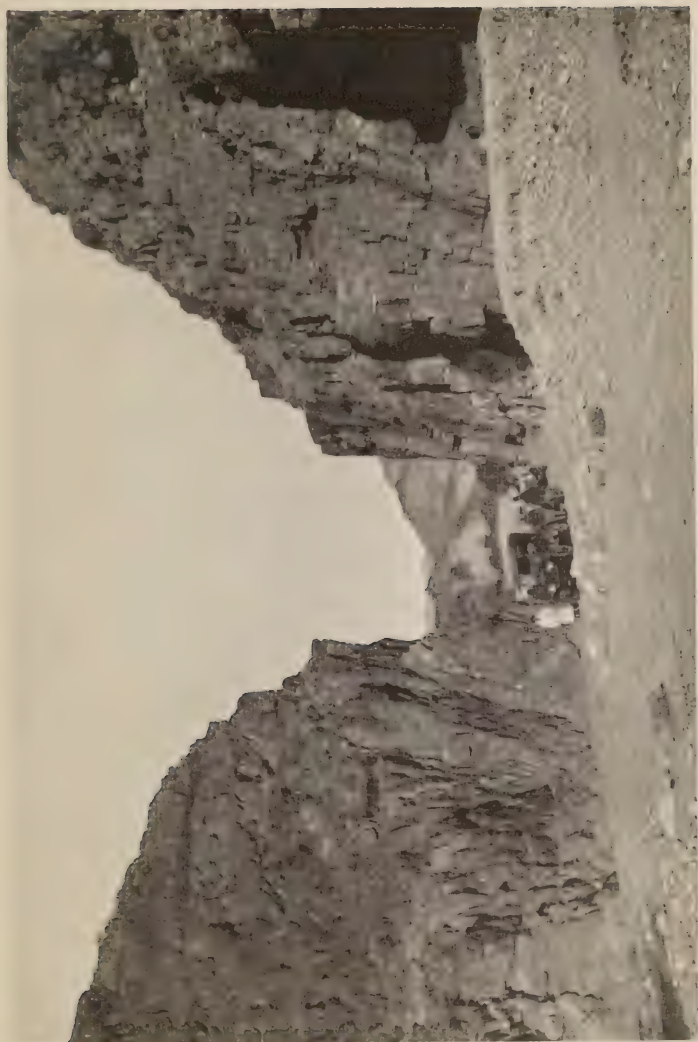
The road, or rather track, and a rough one at that, leads up the bed of the Wadi Feiran to Wadi Feiran Oasis, which in the days of old was the city

of Paran. The scenery here is wonderful as one travels up a gorge with towering granite mountains on either side with the huge massif of Gebel Serbal dominating the lesser peaks, till one arrives at a dense grove of luxuriant palms watered by a sparkling little stream. This almost compensates one for the discomfort of the journey.

(Distance—Wadi Feiran to Oasis, 15 miles.

Time—1 hour 15 minutes.)

From the oasis the road runs up the Wadi Sheikh, and one must be careful not to make a mistake and take the Wadi Solaf that leads away to the right. There are occasionally ibex-shooting parties bound for Gebel Tarbush, so that car tracks up the Wadi Solaf are generally in evidence, but the Wadi Solaf, though it appears to be the more direct route, does not lead to the Monastery. The Wadi Sheikh is moderately level, and the surface is good if not too cut up by car traffic. Towards the end of the wadi the track runs through a grove of tamarisk trees, then through the Bueib (little doors) of Gebel Watir, and past the tomb of Nebi Saleh which stands on a small hill to the south. Shortly after leaving Nebi Saleh the road swings to the north and three miles farther on one sees the Monastery with its cypress trees in a cleft in the mountain-side. Permission to visit the Monastery should be obtained from the Archbishop in Cairo before leaving, and arrangements can be made for accommodation, and, in special cases, some food can be obtained. This, however, is entirely



The Entrance to Wadi Feiran from Wadi Sheikh on the Monastery track.





a personal matter between the traveller and the staff of the Monastery, who are only too willing to welcome visitors who come to see the site of the Law-Giving in the right spirit.

(Distance—Oasis to Monastery, 35 miles. Time—2 hours 30 minutes.)

(Total distance—Cairo to Monastery, 239 miles. Time—13 hours.)

(Timing will depend largely on the state of the road.)

*Cairo to Tor.*—The route taken is the same as that for the Monastery till one reaches the second sign-post after Abu Zeneima at Kilo. 173, which is three miles up the Wadi Feiran.

(Distance—Cairo to Wadi Feiran Junction, 191 miles. Time—9 hours 15 minutes.)

At the junction turn due south and the road then runs down a wide valley called the Gaa, with the huge granite mountains of Southern Sinai to the east. The first five miles are rather rough, but after this the road improves considerably till one is five miles from Tor, when the going is rather soft and bumpy. It can, however, be negotiated with ease by all makes of cars. At Tor there is a rest house on the sea-shore, water supply, petrol and most stores can be purchased in the village.

(Distance—Wadi Feiran Junction to Tor, 39 miles. Time—2 hours.)

(Total distance—Cairo to Tor, 230 miles. Time—11 hours 15 minutes.)

Travellers when journeying in Sinai can communicate with the outer world by the following methods:—

At Hasana, Nekhl, Kuntilla, Themed and Magdaba by paying the police orderly for a telegram and getting him to telephone the message to El Arish, from where the message will be telegraphed. The language difficulty can be overcome by the traveller using the telephone himself and asking for an English-speaking clerk to answer him.

At El Arish, Abu Zeneima and Tor by ordinary telegram from the telegraph office.

At El Arish, Akaba, Auja, Beersheba and Asluj wireless stations exist, and these places communicate with each other and with Cairo and Jerusalem.

Occasionally ibex-shooting parties wish to get off the beaten tracks and pitch their camps as close as possible to the mountains they are working. Gebel Tarbush, which takes one rifle three days to explore, can be reached by turning up the Wadi Solaf which runs into the Wadi Sheikh, about three miles from the Oasis of Wadi Feiran. The going in this wadi for the whole length is fairly hard gravel. Water usually exists in gorges halfway up the mountain, but is difficult to transport, and it is usually more convenient to arrange with camel-men to bring water supplies from the Oasis of Wadi Feiran.

Gebel Serbal, another huge massif, can be shot from the Wadi Feiran. Ibex and leopard are plentiful, but cars cannot be brought to its base, and it is a difficult mountain to climb.

Dahab, on the coast, can be reached by turning

off at the tomb of Nebi Saleh by way of a pass that has been opened to the east of this conspicuous tomb, which leads into the Wadi Nasb and thence to Wadi Dahab. The country in the vicinity is very mountainous, and ibex, though not plentiful, are to be found on every mountain over 5000 feet. Practically all the wadis that lead into the Wadi Nasb are negotiable for short distances, and a large area of possible ibex country is available if the pass at the tomb of Nebi Saleh is crossed. Amongst the most likely mountains are the Gebels Gourn and Habashi, and with either of these it is possible to get cars to within a mile or so of the shooting ground.

From Tor cars can be run over rough country to the base of the mountain range on the east of the town, and to ascend with a certain amount of difficulty for a short distance up the various wadis—*i.e.*, Wadi Hebran, Wadi Isla, &c., which will bring the party to within reasonable distance of ibex country.

It is also possible with cars specially equipped for desert travel to go south from Themed or Kuntilla *via* the Wadi el Butum, and thence to the Wadi el Ain to Nueiba on the coast. No road exists, but the wadi is just negotiable for real exploring parties willing to undergo hardships and difficulties, and equipped with cars that will withstand very rough going. The mountains on either side of the Wadi el Ain are seldom if ever shot over, and ibex are fairly plentiful. Leopards also are to be found, but, owing to their migratory habits, are difficult to obtain.



Many of the wadis in Southern Sinai contain surface water, and camps should never be pitched within two miles of these streams, as anophilæ mosquitoes breed in great numbers and there is considerable risk of contracting malaria.

None of these journeys off the recognised roads should be undertaken without a capable guide. The Frontiers Administration employ four game wardens who act as shikaris and are responsible for the shooting of the following areas: Gebel Tarbush, Gebel Serbal, Gebel Sifsafa, Gebel Habashi and Nueiba and Dahab areas. Application at the Headquarters, Frontiers Administration, Ministry of War, Cairo, or to the Governor, El Arish, should be made at least a fortnight in advance for the services of these wardens, and arrangements will be made for the issuing of game licences, provision of camel transport, etc.

The following maps are available: for Southern Sinai—*i.e.*, all the country south of Suez and Kuntilla, map of Southern Sinai, 1/500,000. For Northern and Central Sinai, 1/250,000. Sheets: Port Said, Rafa, Suez and Akaba. These can be purchased at the Survey of Egypt Office, Giza, Nr. Cairo.





MEDITERRANEAN SEA

DEAD SEA

SINAI

PLATEAU OF EL TIH

EGMA PLATEAU

GULF OF SUEZ

GULF OF AQABA

STRAIT OF JUBAL

STRAIT OF TIRAN

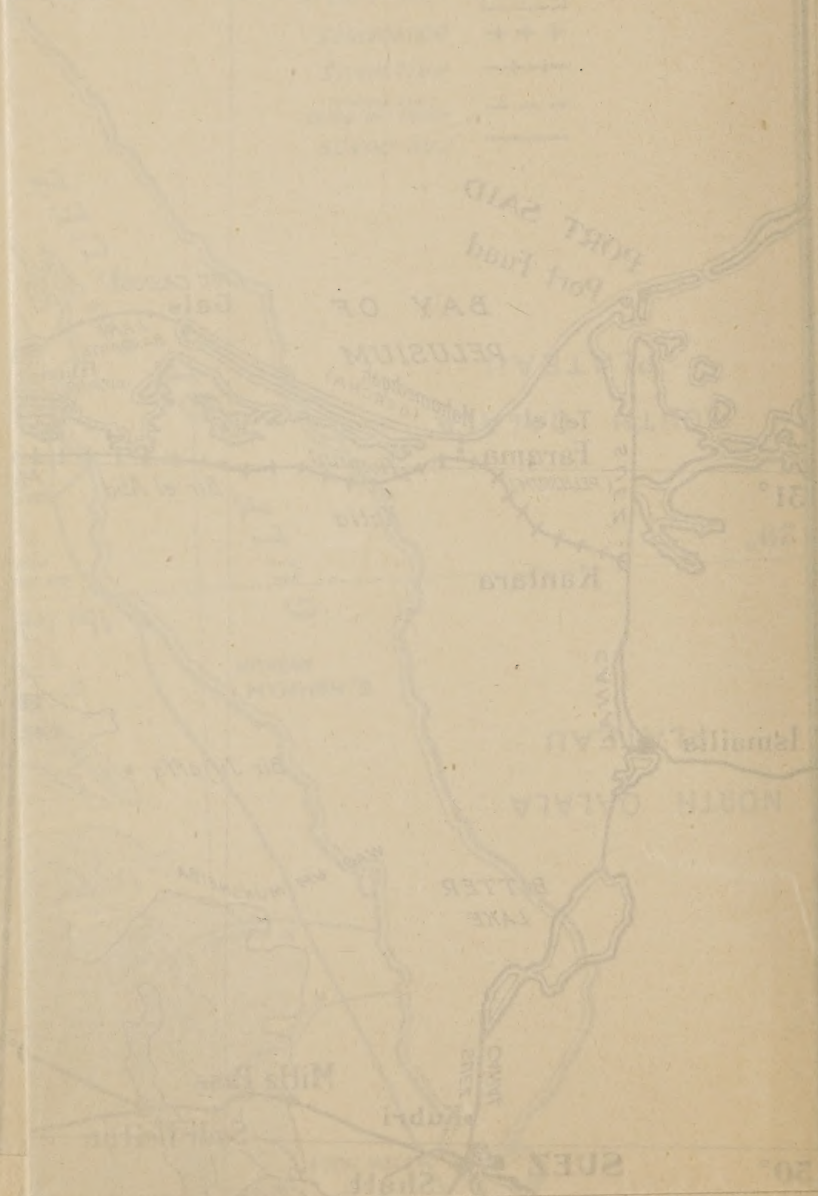
- CAR ROADS
- ROUGH CAR TRACKS (JUST POSSIBLE)
- RAILWAYS
- BOUNDARIES
- 1,500 - 2,500 FT.
- 2,500 - 5,000 "
- OVER 5,000 "
- PEAKS

0 5 10 20 30 40 50  
STATUTE MILES

THE NAMES IN BRACKETS ARE THE CRUSADER OR ROMAN NAMES.



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

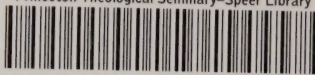






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Yesterday and to-day in Sinai

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